The Kamba Ramayanam

Balakandam

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RAJ BHAVAN
MADRAS-600 022

12 JAN 1989

PREFACE

Many of the poetic works in Tamil can rank with the best anywhere in the world. However, the lovers of literature who do not know the language are denied the pleasure of enjoying these works. Perhaps, some Tamil knowing people themselves would need assistance to comprehend the full meaning of these works composed several centuries ago.

It was to meet these needs that the Government of Tamil Nadu launched an ambitious project in 1988 to bring out translations in English of selected Tamil classics. It was decided by the Committee of Experts I had appointed for this purpose that the translations should be in verse in order that the exquisite artistic appeal of the original may be brought out in adequate measure.

The Committee had set itself the rather difficult task of bringing out the first set of translations by Pongal 1989 and had taken enormous pains in

GOVERNOR OF TAMILNADU
TRUTH ALONE TRIUMPHS

RAJ BHAVAN
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selecting scholars and providing them the necessary guidance and help. I am very happy to find that translations of the 'Natrinai' and the 'Bala Kanda' of Kamban's Ramayana are ready for release and I wish to convey to the members of the Committee and the scholars who undertook this difficult task my heart-felt congratulations and thanks. They have indeed done a great service to Tamil literature.

I also wish to convey my congratulations and thanks to the Vice-Chancellor of the Tamil University, Thanjavur for his valuable efforts in bringing out these publications in a very short time.

I am sure lovers of Tamil literature everywhere will find these works interesting and useful. I look forward to the opportunity of welcoming more and more such publications under the guidance of the Committee.

(P.C. ALEXANDER)

A. PADMANABHAN
Hon'ble Adviser to Governor
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Madras 600 009.

Tamil Language has rich tradition and culture, vigour and vitality and beauty and depth, which most other languages in the world cannot claim. Over a period of twenty centuries it has enriched literature, music and drama. A long line of illustrious poets and poetesses had left behind their priceless treasures through their poems and writings for the future generations to enjoy and possibly to emulate. Saints and Seers have also made their significant contributions in this regard. The much-adored Nayanmars and Alwars sang out their minds and hearts and these outpourings coming as they do from pure divine devotion and concern for the society are even today popular and highly venerated. All these are in the form of poems. It is said "a poet is the heart of the world" and poems started earlier than prose. True to this, Tamil classics are in the form of poetry, enthralling millions and millions of Tamils over a long period of time.

Tamil Nadu Government, under the dynamic and innovative leadership and guidance of our Governor Dr.P.C.Alexander, have formulated a scheme to get select Tamil classics and works translated into English in order to make them available to the readers and admirers outside Tamil Nadu. As a first step, "Narrinai" a great work of Sangam period and "Bala Kandam" of Kamba Ramayanam, have been chosen for translation. A committee of scholars and writers under the able chairmanship of Justice S.Mohan, Officiating Chief Justice, Madras High Court, has done this selection. Thiru A.V.Subramanian and Thiru P.S. Sundaram, the well known scholars have done a commendable job in translating into English "Narrinai" and "Bala

Kandam" respectively. Dr.S. Agesthialingom, Vice-Chancellor and others connected with the Printing Press in the Tamil University, Dr.Avvai Natarajan, Secretary, Tamil Development and culture, and Dr. S.Chellappan, Director of Tamil Development have spared no pains in getting the works printed in time properly.

I am sure this significant step will lead to further steps in getting more and more of Tamil classics and works translated into English and other languages.

Madras,
12-01-1989.

A. PADMANABHAN

Justice Dr. **S. MOHAN**,
Officiating Chief Justice

High Court,
Madras 600 108.

The aesthetic delight arising out of poetry is stile of a compensation available to man in today's problem-ridden world with its pragmatic and utilitarian values. But, it must be conceded that, unlike the other arts, the literary art is wholly dependent on language and that constitutes a great barrier for the lover of literature. If, therefore, the dilettante is enabled to play any role in the understanding of the world's literature, good translations should be made available so that the aesthetic impact of the originals is retained. The spread of the English language throughout the world, if it is to be the best medium through which the great works of poetry in the many languages of the world is to be passed on to the lovers of poetry, can be achieved only by dissemination.

While the vital need for issuing translations of the best Tamil classics is being felt more intensely, it was fortunate that Dr. P.C Alexander, a scholar -- diplomat -- administrator arrived on the scene, taking over the administration of Tamil Nadu as Governor. He evinced great interest in launching a project for issuing translations under the aegis of the Government. He has been the progenitor of this scheme and there can be no doubt that his interest, advice and guidance have been the prime motive force in all things. It is also fortunate that Dr.A.Padmanabhan has been functioning as Adviser to the Governor during this period; he is a poet with an international reputation and his active interest in the scheme has been of the greatest help to the Committee set up and where I function as Chairman.

It was decided to select the *Narrinai*, an Anthology on love, belonging to the Sangam epoch and the *Bala-*

kandam, the first book of Kamban's Ramayana to start with. The Tamils of the Sangam period valued love poetrv above every other variety, considering that it constitutes the highest and the purest creative literature. As regards Kamban's Ramayana, what could one do but, quote from the work of the illustrious scholar, V.V.S.Iyer;

> "In the RAMAYANA OF KAMBAN the world possess an epic which can challenge comparison not merely with the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, the *Paradise Lost* and the *Mahabharata*, but with its original itself, namely, the *Ramayana* of Valmiki"

It was decided to entrust the task of translating these two books into English verse to Thiru A.V.Subramanian and Thiru P.S.Sundaram respectively. These two scholar-poets have already established their credentials, in this difficult field. I find they have done a thorough and an excellent job, preserving the spirit of the originals in an alien medium, at the same time, duly conforming to its idiom. I feel proud to present these verse translations to the discerning lovers of poetry all over the world. Soon the endeavour will be to prepare and issue such translations of all the other worthy classics in Tamil.

I take great pleasure in recording my grateful thanks to the learned scholar-member of the Translation Committee, to the two poets who have done the translation to such high standard and the Vice-Chancellor of the Tamil University, Thanjavur who has had them printed in such an attractive manner in the University Printing Press and within a short time.

My personal thanks and that of the Committee are due to Dr.Avvai Natarajan, Secretary to Government, Tamil Development-Culture Department, who has rendered most valuable service in implementing the project. He is a reputed scholar in Tamil consequently

the quality and level of his help and guidance have not been constrained by the bureaucratic outlook. I am sure under his able guidance, all the most worthwhile classics in Tamil will be translated within a reasonable time frame.

Madras,
12-01-1989.

S. MOHAN

KAMBAN AND HIS POETRY

Subramania Bharati, the first and greatest of modern Tamil poets, writing at a time when Tamil in the place where it was spoken was despised by the Sanskritists as fit only for everyday speech and not for high philosophy or as a vehicle for poetry, and the younger generation gave their heart to English as the language of progress rather than devote any time or thought to their mother-tongue, wrote proudly in Tamil:

> Of all the poets we have known
>   There is none throughout the world
> Like Kamban, Valluvar and Ilango --
>   Bare truth this, not a boast.

Bharati knew more than one language, and was not a chauvinist. These three Tamil writers have indeed a place in world literature which only they can fill, and if the rest of the world is yet to see their greatness, that is due to no fault of theirs.

Of the three, Kamban is the latest. Sober scholarship is inclined to place his date at the close of the

twelfth century after Nammalwar, the Vaishnavite saint-poet who probably belonged to the 9th century. There is a tradition that Kamban's father was a temple-drummer and that he belonged to that caste. But he was well-versed not only in the old Tamil classics like the *Kural* and the works of the Alwars but also in Sanskrit, and he certainly knew the Ramayana in Sanskrit which he took over to render into Tamil verse. The story goes that he listened to the Sanskrit Ramayana every night expounded by the Pandits, and composed in the course of the next day as many as seven hundred quatrains of his own work.

His patron was a Zamindar of **Vennainallur**, obviously a monied man, called Sadayan, whose name he mentions many times over with affection and gratitude in his *Iramavataram* the name he gave to his Ramayana. As is usual Kamban introduces his work with an apology.

A milky ocean is Rama's lay
Which I, a cat, would fain lap up --
Refulgent, roaring, its huge waves
I am tackling now, by fond hope led.

I dare the scorn of all the world
And invite a stain by doing this
To show in their full majesty
Those spotless writers' splendid work --

The three that in the sacred tongue
Told this story, of whom I
The earliest as my model choose
To render into Tamil song.

Valmiki is undoubtedly the one referred to here. Who are the other two? Is the author of the *Adhyatma Ramayana* from whom Tulsi Das derives his *Ram Charit Manas* one of them?

Ravana carrying Sita away without touching her,

uprooting the hut in which she was, not found in Valmiki is common both to the *Adhyatma Ramayana* and Kamban. On the other hand, Rama asking Sita to enter fire before Ravana comes to seize her, so that it is the *maya* Sita that steps out of the fire who becomes Ravana's prisoner, and the real Sita changes place with her when she in turn enters the fire after Ravana's fall is a legerdemain found neither in Valmiki nor in Kamban, but both in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* and in the *Ram Charit Manas*.

It is evident that by the time Kamban wrote, the deification of Rama found already in Valmiki, had been raised much higher. But on the whole, Kamban, like Valmiki and unlike Tulsi Das, is attracted less by the religious appeal of the story than by its human.

This is not to say that he merely says in Tamil what Valmiki has already said in Sanskrit. On the one hand there are the usual conventions laid down by the post-Valmiki Sanskrit rhetoricians like Dandi whose poetics prescribed what an ideal epic should contain, like descriptions of the chief river, land, the city; and the conventions of Tamil poetry which he follows -- e.g. the primacy of love between a young hero and a nubile woman and the exaggerated languishings of separated lovers. On the other, he is also the product of his time, place and upbringing -- as when he makes Rama say that he will have nothing to do with Sita after her year-long captivity under the Rakshasa King because during that time she could not have avoided a meat diet! Such thoughtless anachronisms need not detain us.

Given the characters and the situations already in the Adi Kavya what is it that makes Kamban unique? I would say, two things: first his sense of drama and secondly his extraordinary command of the Tamil language, and the beauty and dexterity of his use of it.

The Ayodhya Kandam whether in Valmiki or in Kamban gives the amplest scope for variey of feelings -- Dasaratha's infatuation with his youngest wife followed with Rama's calm; Kausalya's expectations dashed to the ground; Sita's pleading that she should be allowed to accompany Rama to the forest followed by her spirited twitting of her husband that he a hero should be so diffident of protecting her from possible harm. Kamban's idealisation of Sita will not let her twit Rama with impotence for not daring to take her with him, as Valmiki's Sita does. Instead she appeals to his love.

You contend against love and would renounce
The ties that bind. Where is that sun
Destructive? There or here? What wild forests
Can scorch me more than separation from you?

In a second instance where Kamban departs from Valmiki he is not equally improving on the original. In Valmiki Rama tells his mother at once his father's two commands -- that the kingdom will go to Bharata and that Rama himself should go to the forest for fourteen years -- whereupon Kausalya crashes down to the ground like a tree branch that is cut. Kamban seeks to improve on this by making Rama give his message in two instalments -- first that Bharata and not he will be king, whereupon Kausalya says what seems to me to be wholly unnatural:

"Not in order, but for that
A thrice virtuous soul is he;
Faultless, even better than you",
Said she whose love embraced all four.

"And son", said she, "the King's command
Though strange you must not set aside;
To your brother give the land --
And one with him long life be yours!"

But when Rama delighted by his mother's words goes on to mention the second command,

"For seven and seven more years I must
In deep forests dwell with those
That practise stern austerities"

Even before those words of fire
Could touch her ears she screamed aloud,
Bewildered stood, grew thin, went pale,
Was swollen with tears, choked, fell down.

"Were", she wailed, "those words a lie --
'All this land is yours to rule'
Or a poison prepared for me?
How shall I live? I dread! I dread"

She cracked her fingers, wrung the womb
That had borne her beloved son with hands
Tender as tendrils, braceleted --
Fell down as if choked, in a sweat.

"Great kindness is the King's", she sneered;
"When plan you to depart?" she asked.
Though still alive she was feeling then
All the bitterness of death.

The words that pass between Rama and Lakshmana on this occasion are equally dramatic. To Lakshmana's finding fault with Dasaratha and Kaikeyi for their conspiracy against Rama, Rama replies,

"It is not the river's fault if it runs dry,
Nor in this matter is the fault the King's,
Nor hers that brought us up, nor his
her son's --
It is Fate, my dear, you should blame; why
all this wrath?"

To which Lakshmana replies,
"My heart is like the fire in a forge

The bellows set ablaze; it is hard to quench.
My mind shall quell her mind -- my bow,
  you will see,
Will prove that Fate's Fate which the primal
  Gods obey!"

Similarly in Guha's reactions to Bharata -- first his suspicion, then his doubt, finally his unbounded admiration and complete surrender -- our common feelings are roused and raised to the highest pitch.

"My beloved master, collyrium-hued, not King!
Look, who comes here, the trecherous usurper!
Will fiery arrows red with blood not fly?
Should he escape, won't I be called a cur?"

This is followed by

A bark-clad figure, body covered with dust;
A wan and cheerless face like a morning moon;
A sorrow that would melt the very stones --
It was this he saw transfixed, and his bow slid down!

"My Lord he resembles, and his brother that other;
A hermit's his garb, seems endless his woe;
His head bowed in worship at Rama's path --
Can a brother to my liege commit a wrong?"

In Valmiki, it must be noted, Bharata assumes the bark-cloth only after he meets Guha and learns from him the manner in which Rama and Lakshmana had clad themselves. Kamban's deliberate departure from this,

A sorrow that would melt the very stones --
It was this he saw transfixed, and
  his bow slid down

gets the maximum dramatic effect out of the situation.

And then finally when he gets to know from Bharata his intentions, comes the exclamation

"For you your mother got, your father gave
A kingdom which you spurned as deadly sin!
O pensive face, O Prince beyond all praise,
Can even a thousand Ramas equal you?"

Kamban is noted for his exaggeration and this last may well scandalise the orthodox reader, to whom Rama is God, as nothing short of blasphemy. But I personally am always greatly moved by it. It reveals a character which can recognise Godliness wherever it sees it, not only in one particular idol or man. It was the greatness of Rama as of Gandhi to evoke in all those who came into contact with him something of his own greatness. Spirits, says Shakespeare, are not finely touched but to fine issues. Kamban's Rama saw in Guha a sterling quality which made him declare after the briefest acquintance that till then he and his brothers were four; but from now on with Guha they would be five. In Valmiki only Sugriva is given this honour, and that too by Bharata.

The explanation offered for this by the Rt. Hon'ble Srinivasa Sastri in his lectures on the Ramayana, based on earlier interpreters, is curious. Vibhishana came to Rama for succour and was the benefited party. Sugriva, on the other hand was the one to whom Rama went for succour. It is only right that Bharata should see in him rather than in Vibhishana one worthy to join the select circle of Dasaratha's sons. The question of Guha as a brother to the Princes simply does not arise.

Those who can think only in terms of quid pro quo can never understand the beauty of either Kamban's Guha or Valmiki's Sabari. Kamban himself by successively enlarging the family from four to five (Guha), five to six (Sugriva), and six to seven (Vibhishana) -- there

was no family planning in his days! -- dilutes the beauty of the first fine spontaneous gesture however much this may edify those not capable of seeing a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower and must have everything spelt out for them over and over again. They will not understand Aristotle's saying, "He who says he has friends does not know the value of friendship." Valluvar too has a similar statement.

Tulsi Das for his part cannot forget that Guha after all belonged to a low caste. When Bharata embraces him as though he was embracing Lakshmana,

> "Blessed, blessed is he!" cried the gods in auspicious tones as they praised him and rained down flowers. "Him whom the world and the Veda declare to be altogether mean, him the contact with whose shadow involves a ceremonial cleansing, Rama's younger brother is taking to his heart and embracing with a thrill of rapturous emotion' ..... It is no wonder; it has been so age after age; whom has not Raghubir exalted?*

Again, when Hanuman appears before Ravana, Kamban gets the utmost out of this confrontation. In Valmiki Ravana does not deign to speak to the monkey direct. But Kamban's Ravana is not so disdainful. He wants to know direct from Hanuman who he is and, being informed that he is a messenger of Angada, Vali's son, asks him how the great Vali is and his kingdom. There is no need to read any irony in the question or to assume that Ravana knew already the answer to it and is only indirectly sneering at Rama's lack of chivalry in the manner he disposed of Vali.

Such a reading seems to me far-fetched and, though nothing was impossible for Ravana, to credit

---

* Ramacharitamanasa translated by W.D.P.Hill.

him with an elaborate network of spies keeping him posted with everything that may be happening anywhere at any time. If such was the case he need not have been ignorant of what happened to Khara and his fourteenthousand companions until his sister Surpanakhi carried the news to him.

On the other hand there is irony and cutting sarcasm in Hanuman's reply to Ravana, his tongue not quite in his cheek:

"Titan, be not afraid: the fierce Vali
  Has long since left this world:
He will never come back, and his tail
  Has also gone with him!

The tail which had bound the ten-headed Ravana once as if he was no more than a beetle, and jumped with him from one end of the world to another back and forth. Ravana has to pretend not to see the insinuation. His running down Sugriva and the rest for compromising with Rama who has killed their king, and doing his bidding as though they were his servants, is also an excellent stroke arising out of the situation and not found in Valmiki.

In dealing with Ravana's love for Sita, Kamban makes the utmost of the pathos and tragedy of unrequited love ignoring the moral issue of adultery. There is nothing in Valmiki corresponding to the way Ravana declares his love to Sita in the Asokavana:

A traitor to myself I took delight
In that nectar-poison, you THE woman;
Worn out I wouldn't desist and so die.
In you I seek refuge, O nectar-born!

You have vanquished me -- taught the moon
  to burn,
The South to sear, my diamond shoulders

droop;
Made Madan crow, acquainted me with grief,
Gods shed their fear, and Heaven knows
what besides!

"No warrior ever defeated me," he continues. "What a shame that I should die of unrequited love!" and then finally,

"Indeed of yore Ahalya who took joy
In Indra's guilty love was none the worse --
No spell nor drug can cure infatuate love
Save the loved one's nectar-lips, O nectar-
tongued!"

Love and heroism are the twin themes of all epics and plays whether of the East or the West, whether at the time of Homer and Valmiki, or Kalidasa and Kamban, or the heroic tragedy of 17th century England. To Kamban's Ravana fame for courage is of greater consequence than a tame and unquestioning pursuit of goodness. When Indrajit before going on his last mission advises Ravana, not out of fear but out of love for him, to desist even at that stage, give up his guilty love and make peace with Rama,

"A fool's talk, Son", says Ravana,
What use my twenty shoulders
If out of fear, I now yield Sita back?
Better in battle lose this bubble body
And so achieve immortal fame in song.

"Though I should lose, as long as the Vedas
stand
My name must stand if victor Rama's does;
What's here today tomorrow must depart--
Death comes to all, but fame endures for ever.

"Why talk more? Go home and pluck the darts
From off your shoulders. Time to rest from
strife.

> Expend the night in ease", he said; and roared
> Like an angry tiger, "Bring my chariot forth".

The speech is worthy of Milton's Satan, the action that of an angry tiger -- but it is precisely these things that appeal to the common man, not the wisdom of a Buddha, or the gentleness of a Yudhishthira. There is no drama in wisdom and gentleness.

It is well known that while the Mahabarata presents life for the most part as it is, the Ramayana presents highly idealised situations and characters. Valmiki however every now and then lets actual life break in. Dasaratha for example wants Rama's coronation to take place while Bharata is away because, though Bharata is indeed a good man, loyal to his elders, devoted to Dharma, compassionate and self-controlled, "the mind of man is inconstant" and a *fait accompli* prevents all possible mischief. Kausalya when she is deprived of the happiness of her son's coronation comes out with her long-supressed grief at never having enjoyed her husband's affection and suffering many indignities because of Kaikeyi even when Rama was around. Valmiki's Vibhishana in taking refuge with Rama was not altogether uninfluenced by the hope of inheriting the kingdom of Lanka after Ravana. Kamban's art -- call it romantic if you like -- has no place for these inconvenient truths of acutal life. He knows that the ordinary reader will be happy without them.

To turn now to the second great quality of Kamban -- his expert use of the language. There is a tendency especially among us in the East to confuse poetry with piety, to look upon poets primarily as teachers, to use the word "prophet" as the Hebrews did for "poet", and to look upon a poet's inspiration as a divine means for making the readers lead better lives. But goodness, truth and beauty are each one of them an ultimate and a different value, and more is lost than

gained my mixing them up and pretending that they are all the same. In any case, what inspires a poet is not merely the truth or goodness of what he says or writes, but the beauty of what he perceives, whether of form or of conduct, and unless this perception is clothed in words that cannot be bettered he cannot claim to be a poet. He may be a very good teacher, but that is a different matter.

Valmiki chose to write in one metre and form throughout except for the end slokas of the sargas which might or might not have been his work. He maintains all through the epic a certain dignity, never losing his poise, hardly ever saying a syllable too much, treating with simplicity and severity a serious subject, thereby qualifying his manner eminently for what Matthew Arnold in the 19th century described as the grand style. Kamban like Shakespeare and unlike Milton was not wedded to just one style. He can be grand on occasion as when Vibhishana laments his brother's death --

உண்ணாதே உயிருண்ணா தொரு நஞ்சு சனகியெனும் பெருநஞ்சுன்னை
கண்ணாலே நோக்கவே போக்கியதே உயிர்நீயுங் களப்பட்டாயே
எண்ணாதே எண்ணிய சொல் இன்றினித்தான் எண்ணுதியோ? எண்இல் ஆற்றல்
அண்ணாவோ!!அண்ணாவோ! அசுரர்கள் தம் பிரளயமே! அமரர் கூற்றே!

O you, of might immeasurable, brother, brother,
  A typhoon to the Titans, death to gods!
Do you today at last take note of what
  I told you once when thoughtlessly I left you?
No venom kills unless partook, but her
  Sita, great venom, you but saw and were
  killed --
And now, you too, even you lie dead in the
  field!

Or when Mandodari laments

வெள்ளெருக்கஞ் சடைமுடியான் வெற்படுத்த திருமேனி மேலுங் கீழும்
எள்ளிருக்கு மிடமின்றி யுயிரிருக்கு மிடநாடி யிழைத்த வாறோ
கள்ளிருக்கு மலர் கூந்தற் சானகியை மனச்சிறையிற் கரந்த காதல்
உள்ளிருக்கு மெனக்கருதி யுடல்புகுந்து தடவியதோ வொருவன் வாளி?

Alas, that one fell arrow through and through
Should pierce the frame which once shook
  Siva's hill!
Did it perchance grope in each nook to see
If love of Sita is still imprisoned there?

The last is a "conceit" characteristic of Kamban but, like that of the Metaphysicals of the 17th century, Kamban's poetry took in its net everything, the merely pretty as well as the sublime, and the feeling behind it all is enough to sweep away any sense of incongruity.

With the grandeur of the verses in which Vibhishana pours out his lament for his brother may be contrasted the tripping lines in which Hanuman announces to Sita the death of Ravana:

ஏழை சோபனம்! ஏந்திழை சோபனம்!
வாழி சோபனம்! மங்கள சோபனம்!
ஆழியான அரக்கனை ஆரியச்
சூழி யானை துகைத்தது, சோபனம்!

Hooray! Hooray! I bring great news!
Sad days are over, glad days are here!
That huge sea-monster, terror to all
The Aryan elephant has crushed under foot!

Every word to Kamban as to any great poet is a thing of value, and his delight in playing with it is unbounded. Rama in Valmiki passes through Gautama's ashram and Ahalya, for so many years for her sin invisible to humanity, regains her lost self on Rama's approach. Gautama too turns up on the occasion, and Rama uniting the Rishi with his wife passes

on, flowers from the sky blessing the union. In Kamban Rama's foot touches the stone into which Ahalya has been turned whereupon that lady emerges out of it in all her beauty. This occasion gives rise to a burst of admiration on the part of Viswamitra:

> இவ்வண்ண நிகழ்ந்தவண்ண மினியிந்த வுலகுக் கெல்லாம்
> உய்வண்ண மன்றிமற்றோர் துயர்வண்ண முறுவ துண்டோ
> மைவண்ணத் தரக்கி போரின் மழைவண்ணத் தண்ணலேயுன்
> கைவண்ண மங்குகண்டேன் கால்வண்ண மிங்கு கண்டேன்.

How the one word *vannam* is repeated again and again, the *kai* and *kaal* --- hand and leg -- neatly contrasted in the last line, and place found also for a beautiful sentiment, viz. that from now on with the advent of Rama not sorrow but salvation will be humanity's lot!

> Thuswise the past, and now for all the world
> Not sorrow's but salvation's path you have
> blazed!
> That fight between dark demon and rain-cloud
> Showed your arm's prowess there: here I see
> your foot's!

I cannot of course in my translation play with just one word in English corresponding to the Tamil *vannam*. But take another instance -- Vali's disillusionment with Rama, and the stinging way he disposes of him for shooting at him from a covert:

> நூலியற்கையு நுங்குலத் துந்தையர்
> போலியற்கையுஞ் சீலமும் போற்றிலை
> வாலியை படுத்தாயலை மன்னற
> வேலியைப் படுத்தாய் விறல் வீரனே.

That he should leave this world with a pun on his lips -- and describe Rama as a viral veeran (with a possible dhvani of a viral veeran Tom Thumb hero?) is a dramatic revelation of character made possible

by Kamban's wonderful capacity to realise a situation and create a personality and bring all this home to us by his complete mastery of words. Can this be adequately translated into English, pun and all? Well, there is no harm in trying --

"Codes and your kin's traditions set at naught
Right conduct disregarded, your *offence*
Has the *fence* of Dharma damaged, man of might
More than me, Vali!"

The supreme test of a poet is how many of his sayings have passed into the language as the common possession of everybody. Kamban can well stand this test. His *tol kantar tole kantar* -- "Who saw his shoulder his shoulder only saw" -- *pirintavar kutinal peca ventumo* -- "When old friends meet, what need of words?" are examples which leap to the mind. Kamban who can often be wearisome -- his *por* is a bore -- was a devoted student of Valluvar and had learnt from him the art of terseness used when he needed it.

தடுத்திமை யாம லிருந்தவர் தாளின்
மடுத்தது நாணுதி வைத்தது நோக்கார்
கடுப்பினி லியாரு மறிந்திலர் கையால்
எடுத்தது கண்டன ரிற்றது கேட்டார்

Their eyes unwinking, those around
Saw not toe pressed or string fixed --
The lifted bow they saw in a flash
And heard the thunder of its crash.

I would submit that by referring to thunder and lightning in my translation I am only making explicit the metaphor implied in the original.

Hanuman announcing to Sita the fall of Ravana, Bharata beside himself with joy at hearing that Rama is indeed coming back --

He bowed to the Brahmins, he bowed to the
  Princes
He bowed to the housemaids, he bowed to himself
He seemed all lost, got up, stood still --
How like drunkenness is love!

and in another vein the comments of Sita's handmaids when Rama is asked to string the bow

Ere Rama broke that one strong bow
Ordered by the ancient sage
Kama broke a thousand others
Aiming at the maidens there!

"Too heavy is that bow!" said some;
"Too bleak her life," some others said,
"If her soft hands remain unclasped
By the big hand of the hero here."

"How shameless of the sage," said some;
"How heartless of the King!" said others;
"If this youngman can't bend the bow
What use her breasts? Her life a wreck!"

That mountainous bow which glittered like gold
He lifted aloft as if a garland
With which to wed Sita bejewelled
With shells and bracelets, herself a jewel.

are all examples of both wit and humour.

It is the exuberant joy in every aspect of life finding expression in an unfailing felicity of phrase which makes the Kamba Ramayanam the wonderful poem it is. Describing Rama, Sita and Lakshmana going deeper into the forest, Kamban writes

வெய்யோ னொளி தன்மேனியின் விரிசோதியின் மறைய
பொய்யோ வெனு மிடையாளொடு மிளையானொடும் போனான்

மையோமர கதமோ மறி கடலோ மழை முகிலோ
ஐயோவிவன் வடிவென்பதோ ரழியா வழ குடையான்.

The sun's rays lost in his own splendour
With his brother and wisp-waist wife went he.
"Black magic? jade mountain? rain-cloud or
  rolling sea?
"O wonder!" gasped the viewers of his beauty
  without end.

Kamban was a scholar as well as a poet, an enthusiastic admirer of Nammalwar on whom he wrote an *andaadi*. In Nammalwar's *Periatiruandaadi* occurs the stanza.

வானோ ? மறிகடலோ ? மாருதமோ ? தீயகமோ ?
கானோ ? ஒருங்கிற்றுங் கண்டிலமால் — ஆனின்ற
கன்றுயர தாமெறிந்து காயுதிர்த்தார் தாள் பணிந்தோம்
வன்றுயரை யாவா ! மருங்கு.

vano? marikatalo? marutamo? tiyakamo?
kano? orunkirrunkantilamal -- aninra
kanruyara tamerintu kayutirttar talpanintom
vanruyarai yava! marunku.

This bears the meaning

Where did our sins' offspring go?
To the sky or the sea, into air, fire or
  forest?
Not finding them anywhere near us
We bow in gratitude to his feet
Who slung a calf and brought down a fruit --

the last line referring to one of young Krishna's exploits whereby he disposed of an asura coming to him in the shape of a calf to kill him. He was himself flung by Krishna at a tree and brought down in the process another asura in the shape of a fruit waiting there to kill Krishna!.

This rendering is in accordance with the usual way of taking the word *orungirru* as meaning "disappeared". But *orungirru* could also mean "came together", and we must admire Kamban for taking that meaning of the word when he takes over and modifies Nammalwar's lines. Darkness, cloud and rolling sea are all gathered now in one place in the shape of Rama to the amazement of his beholders, instead of being scattered variously as in Nammalwar's reference to the sorrows which are the offspring of his sins disappearing because of Krishna's mercy. One lamp has thus lit another, as is the way of lamps, and of great poets and artists as well as scientists who stand on each other's shoulders, to produce a greater splendour, attain new heights for humanity.

To be able to appreciate Kamban to the fullest an intimate knowledge of Tamil poetry is thus necessary. But his own poetry is such that even without such knowledge, it can be both understood and appreciated.

It is strange that all this while no attempt should have been made to translate the whole of Kamban into a modern European language to present it to the world. The six cantos of the total seven of the Ramayana which alone Kamban rendered into Tamil run to a staggering 10,368 stanzas even if we regard as spurious another 1,293 found in other versions than the one adopted by the Kamban Kazhaham as the most likely to be genuine. But Valmiki's Ramayana is even longer and has been translated in full. We owe a deep debt to our Governor Dr. P.C.Alexander that an attempt should now be made to take on this task, and to the Government of Tamil Nadu for placing its resources at the disposal of those willing to do the job. How good the result is it will be for the intelligent public to examine and decide. But few will say, when they have seen Kamban even in his clouded

glory, that the attempt was not worth making.

P.S.Sundaram

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PROEM

He alone is our head,
Our sole refuge who, by himself,
Creates, preserves and puts an end
To all the worlds in ceaseless sport. (1)

That essence seers can't reveal
I can't expound -- but of the three[1]
The First is easily the best
And best to plunge within that sea. (2)

Those who chant the holy Vedas
Which are both boundless and eternal
Begin and end with Hari's name;
Clutch his feet, true, just and good,
And unattached will clutch naught else.[2] (3)

---

1. Satwa, rajas and tamas, the three gunas of which all things are made. The first of these -- goodness -- is symbolised by the first of the Trinity in order of excellence, viz. Vishnu according to Kamban, of whom Rama is an incarnation.

2. Echoing a verse in the Kural (350).

A milky ocean is Rama's lay
Which I, a cat, would fain lap up —
Refulgent, roaring, its huge waves
I tackle now by fond hope led. (4)

How strange that with the poorest words
I should tell again that arrow's tale
Which pierced seven trees[3] like a rishi's curse —
A great story by a great sage![4] (5)

I dare the scorn of all the world
And doing this invite a stain
To show in its full majesty
That spotless writer's splendid work. (6)

My verse indeed may shock all those
Used to the sweetness of various modes
As a loud drum will the sensitive ears
Of an *asunam*[5] used to a honied lute. (7)

One thing I would say to those expert
In trinal Tamil — verse, song and play —
That a critic's ear is ill-attuned
To a madcap's fool's or a devotee's words. (8)

Will children's sketches of rooms and halls
Scratched on a floor annoy an artist?
Should my poor and foolish poem
Irk those well-trained in making verse? (9)

---

3. Reference to the seven trees which Rama pierced with a single arrow in the Kishkinda Kanda to convince Sugriva of his prowess.

4. Valmiki.

5. A bird highly sensitive to music.

Of the three[6] that in the sacred tongue[7]
Told this story, I shall take
The earliest master for my source
To render into Tamil song. (10)

In the Vennainallur of Sadaian[8]
Was this lay made which sets at length
The spotless Rama's mighty deeds —
Great models left by his descent. (11)

---

6. Valmiki and two others after him. Who those two were is a matter of conjecture -- Vyasa and Vasishtha or Vasishtha and Bodayana?

7. Sanskrit.

8. Kamban's patron, a rich landlord.

1. THE RIVER

Let us talk now of Kosala's river –
The land whose arrows never strayed,
Whether they were its men's five senses
Or the sharp shafts of its women's eyes,
Their breasts for ever bedecked with jewels. (12)

Clouds like Siva ashen-hued
Grazed and drank their fill of the sea
To return dark-hued like the Lord [1]
With the goddess Lakshmi on his chest. (13)

They rose and spread over Himavan
As if the sea said to itself,
"The sun has taxed Siva's father-in-law, [2]
It is meet with our waters we cool him now." (14)

The sky looking at the gold of the hills,
Dug it up with its silver torrents,
And the clouds like the generous souls they were
Gave it away in the form of rains! (15)

1. Vishnu.

2. Uma, Siva's wife, was the daughter of the Himalayas.

That rain water gathered and flowed
Like gifts to the seekers of Vedic wisdom,
Or the fame of a king of honour and virtue
Who respects the codes and whose rule is benign. (16)

The river in flood was a woman of the town
Depriving the hills of all they had,
Clasping their bodies, heads and feet
A moment, but to denude them of all! (17)

Like merchants and tradesmen it
 carried on its back
Pearls, gold and peacock plumes,
The white tusks of elephants,
Akhil[3] and rare sandalwood. (18)

It was a rainbow multi-coloured,
Full of flowers and of pollen,
Yellow honey and red gold
And the black must of elephants. (19)

Levelling hills, uprooting trees,
Hustling leaves and all things else,
The flood was like that monkey host
Which would bridge one day the sea with zeal.[4] (20)

Breaking bounds, fly-blown, reckless,
Exuberant, muddied within,
Belching and throwing things around,
It resembled a drunkard full of toddy! (21)

With elephants and other beasts
Dragged along as if in rows,
And flags on its course as it went
It resembled an army marching on the sea! (22)

---

3. A fragrant wood the smoke of which is used for perfuming the hair.

4. Rama's army bridging the sea to Lanka.

Its model the kings of the solar race
With virtues steady and well-kept,
Sarayu a mother as well as a river
Fed with her milk all lives on earth. (23)

It was fragrant with the powders
The hill-women made, saffron, *ghoshtam*,
Cardamon, chill sandal paste,
Vetchi, *narandam*, *naagam* and *konrai*,
Odorous shrubs, honey and *akhil*. (24)

It was like the army of a conqueror
In the way it forced the hunter tribes
Out of their homes, women beating their wombs,
Bows and arrows swept away. (25)

Pulling off the hoops and gobbling up
Curds, milk, butter, melted ghee,
Uprooting *kurundai* and *marudai*,
Sweeping up women's jewels and clothes,
It resembled the God who danced[5]
So pure on the snake which was spotted
and striped. (26)

Breaking doors down, alarming the farmers,
Its must-like front attracting beetles,
Setting bells ringing, sweeping stakes away,
It was like a tusker reaching the farm lands. (27)

Pastures turned to ploughlands, hills
turned to dales,
Worthless saline soil turned to
fertile fields,
The river changing forms and functions at will
Was like Fate working ceaselessly the
cycle of births. (28)

Rushing with its water, gold and pearls,
While the canal keepers beat their drums
The river delved underground and flowed
Into numerous branches, a caste into sects! (29)

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5. Krishna.

Bees and Lakshmi found their lodgings
in lotuses,
Their sweethearts' eyes and Kaman's[2] shafts in
youngmen's garlands,
Pearls and corals in the seas fed by
rains in season
And truth and learning on the tips of
all men's tongues. (36)

Conches in streams, buffaloes in the shade,
Bees in garlands, Lakshmi in lotuses,
Turtles in the mire, pearlshells on banks,
Swans in ricestacks, and peacocks in groves! (37)

The things that gleamed in that land
Were gold turned up by the ploughshare,
Pearls the oysters shed,
Heaped gems from levelled farms,
The green of the paddy fields,
Fishes and sugarcane knots,
Bees and the farmgirls' faces
And the lotus like which they glowed. (38)

Minstrels with small lutes
Sipped sweet toddy and went
Singing from place to place
To the beat of the tambour,
And that sound raised from their sleep
The damsels peacock-like
Slumbering on golden beds
In their terraces silver-white. (39)

The juice from the sugarcane press,
Toddy from the palm,
Fruit juice from the groves,
Honey from the combs
And drops from flower garlands

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2. The Tamil form of Kāmadeva, the god of love.

Crossing all borders
Flowed into the sea
For the fish there to enjoy. (40)

Their mouths dripping toddy
Farmers did not weed
But just walked around
Reminded by the stalks
Of the eyes, hands, legs, mouths, faces
Of the farmgirls and their prattle –
When love to the lowly comes from above
Will they ever wake out of it? (41)

Who can tell the number
Of the sword-eyed maids who raised
Men's love with their sweet prattle,
Red mouth and lightning mien,
When the dark waves of the sea
Smelt of the flowers and saffron
They wore when they went bathing
In the freshes the rivers brought? (42)

Youngmen with earrings bathing in pools
Left such a sediment in grove and field
Of scented sandal-paste red and white
That it attracted bees in swarms! (43)

Red-webbed swans left their chicks
  in the fields —
Cradles in rich lotus blossoms —
Going after the maids whose eyes
Gleamed and darted like the carp.
And the chicks drank the milk which dripped
From buffaloes longing for their calves –
Their hooves mud-stained –
  and were put to sleep
By lullabies sung by frogs. (44)

In the groves the koels mated
And peacocks danced, putting to shame

The halls where spear-eyed maids performed ;
And drunken bees sang evening-songs
To rouse the downy swan kings
From their lotus-beds in the morning! (45)

Many married the right mates.
Others mated music to words
As its shadow matches a flying bird.
Still others listened to learned talks
Sweeter than ambrosia.
And many enjoyed the sight of guests
And the prospect of feasting them. (46)

Some engaged in cock fights
Setting bird against bird
Not out of any enmity
But for love of the fight.
Heart black, crest redder than eye,
Sharp knives attached to toes,
Enjoying the fierce fight
And scorning to run away! (47)

Some engaged in bull fights,
Bull battering bull,
Red-eyed, fierce and dark
As if the whole world's blackness
Had been divided and set
One half against the other,
The spectators shaking their heads
The bees from their chaplets buzzing
And their plaudits reaching the sky! (48)

Some engaged in ploughing
Whooping at their oxen
Breaking the stems of lotuses
And sweeping pearls and gold;
Scattering gems, making conches wail
The fish leap in furrows,
Turtles draw in their limbs
And the *varaals*[3] hide in sluices. (49)

3. A kind of fish.

Ships put off their burdens
Resting their backs on the shore
After exporting rare goods
As Mother Earth unburdens and rests
Under a renowned king
Who knows the codes, is greedless
Is angry where he should be,
Knows what he needs and gets them,
Being at the same time
Merciful to his people. (50)

Some cut the paddy with sickles
And heaped it to the sky,
Got it trodden by oxen
Which knew their own minds.
The grains separated from the chaff
Were given first to the poor
And then taken home
For themselves and their guests
In carts which pitted the roads
And bent the land's back down. (51)

Like bees collecting honey
From luxuriant flowers
The farmers gathered for themselves
Things from various places —
Grains from the fertile fields,
Ripe fruits from fragrant groves,
Pulses from their backyards,
Vegetables from creepers,
And tubers dug from the ground. (52)

Everywhere there was noise
Of Brahmins being fed,
And the people in their houses
With guests and relatives
Served with the three fruits,[4]

---

4. Plantain, jackfruit and mango.

Many pulses served with ghee,
Thick red curds, coarse sugar,
And in between the rice. (53)

Bees in the farmland
Mistook for their mates
The bright eyeballs
Of maids with lotus faces
And went and wooed them! (54)

Maids with luring breasts
And eyes more potent than Kama
Made men bow to them;
And fishes got drunk on the toddy
Which dripped from the palms. (55)

Buffaloes roamed like clouds
On the fields of the moist land
And thinking of their calves
Dripped milk which fertilised
The paddy growing there. (56)

The water drained from rice
Washed in kitchens lacking nothing
Wended through areca groves
And fertilised paddy fields. (57)

Cocks red-hued and crested
Scratching in dust heaps
Brought out gems which sparrows
Mistook for glowworms
And bore to their nests to eat. (58)

Milkmaids strained their lovely hands
Churning butter with much ado,
White bangles protesting loud,
Slender waists going fore and aft. (59)

Parrots chirped in millet fields;
Young bees hummed in flowerbeds;

Waterbirds trilled in tanks and pools
And huskers sang in richmen's houses. (60)

Dark-eyed little girls on the shores
Sifting heaped-up areca nuts
For putting up their castles of sand
Found pearls which they discarded as trash! (61)

Young rams fearless butting their horns
Against each other produced such a noise
That the rainclouds gathering on the hills
Showed their fright in flashes of lightning. (62)

Swans fled from their mates in fear
Hearing the noise the hillmen raised
When they caught and chained wild elephants
With the help of cows parted from their young. (63)

Those who dug for sweet potatoes
Threw up gems which went and hit
The mango trees, and their fruit dripped juice;
Tendrils over the *punnai* trees
Attracted swans from lotus ponds
And made them go and lie down there. (64)

The dance songs of the farmland girls
Lulled the calves of the shepherd clan;
And the songs sung by the littoral girls
Threw dry-grain guardians off their guard![5] (65)

Bamboos shaken by the breeze
Hit honeycombs, and the honey dripped
Like snakes, and reaching the champak plants
Through sluices, were eaten by
  the conches there. (66)

The large-eyed women, their
  brows like crescents,
Being so full of wealth and learning
Had nothing to do all day long
But give to the poor and feed the guest. (67)

5. There was such confusion of tracts!

In all the choultries which gave food
Without distinction to everyone
The vegetables cut rose in heaps,
There were hills of *dals* and
  rice like pearls. (68)

Ships gave countless wealth to its people,
The earth abundant yield; mines jewels;
And the rules and disciplines of their castes
Produced the conduct else not got. (69)

No evil, hence no death untimely;
No unclean thoughts and hence no wrath;
Since virtue was their sole pursuit
They could only rise, never know a fall. (70)

Bounds were broken only by floods,
Marks defaced only on shoulders,[6]
The only small things maiden's waists
Irrepressible the scent of their hair. (71)

The smoke of *akhil* and the kitchens,
Of yagas and of sugarcane mills
Mingling rose up in the sky
Like clouds which dominated all. (72)

Peacocks strutted with their women's grace,
Sunshine blazed like the gems on their breasts,
The clouds in their groves resembled their hair
And the carp in their ponds were like their eyes! (73)

The red lilies were like the lips
Of slender-waisted women bathing;
The lotuses blossomed like the faces
Of farm girls with their swan-like gaits. (74)

The women's spear-eyes laughed at Fate;
Their gaits laughed at the elephants';

6. Men respected each other's enclosures.

Their tight breasts laughed at lotuses;
And their faces laughed at the moon. (75)

That land's gems scattered vied with the day;
Its cocoanuts vied with their women's breasts;
Milk's foam vied with its white silks,
And its marriage drums with the rainclouds. (76)

Its groves resembled the rainclouds
And the golden mountain its stacks of rice;
The sea resembled its embanked waters
And heaven resembled that wealthy land. (77)

What was not a paddy field
  Was a heap of pearls;
What was not that mentioned heap
  Was a mound of salt;
What was not that mound of salt
  Was gold brought by the rivers;
And what was not that golden hill
  Were gems on the sand dunes! (78)

The groves where young girls
  played with balls
Were not of sandal wood but jasmine;
The sites where youngmen practised archery
Resembling the god on his peacock.[7]
Were not gardens but fragrant forests. (79)

The koels learnt the prattle of the girls
  Sweet as treacle;
The peacocks learnt to dance from them;
The oysters learnt to produce pearls
Resembling those maidens' teeth. (80)

The toddy seller's house had its toddy;
The ploughman's house its plough;
The drummer's house never lacked its drums
And the lute player's its lutes. (81)

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7. Muruga, son of Siva, and general of the gods.

Garlands shed cool honey;
Ships shed gems and gold;
Winds blew life-giving nectar;
And poems oozed sweetness. (82)

The plumed peacocks seeing in groves
Young women with flower-decked tresses
And strings of pearls on their breasts,
Took them by their gaits for their mates
And followed them like youngmen's fancies. (83)

None were generous in that land as
none was needy;
None seemed brave as none defied;
Truth was unnoticed as there were no liars;
No learning stood out as all were learned. (84)

Wagons bringing an abundance
Of seasame, millet, corn and panicum,
Horsegram and salt from marshy sites
Drove criss-cross and made one giddy. (85)

As those who cannot get release
Take various forms unceasingly,
Sugar and honey, treacle, toddy and curds
Changed places and made one giddy. (86)

Music vocal and on the flute
Coming from divers parts of the street
Impinged like a river meeting a river
And giddied the yaga and festival crowds. (87)

The noise of the big conches blown,
Of drums beaten with a stick,
And of the thonged *maddalams*[8]
Was all drowned by the ploughmen's
shouts. (88)

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8. Drums beaten by hand, not with sticks.

Red hands feeding with milk
Children with their five-charm necklace[9]
Dribbling at the mouth resembled
Lotuses folding under the moon. (89)

Their beauty had its root in goodness,
Their justice in the absence of lies;
Their women's virtue sprang from their love
And their chastity caused the seasonal rains. (90)

Who could reach the limits of that land,
Great with its numerous groves and return?
Even Sarayu,[10] many-legged,
Could not measure it all this while! (91)

Having all this while spoken of that land
Whose goodness indestructible
Can withstand the stormiest sea —
Let me now speak of its capital. (92)

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9. Babies in their fifth month had a string put round their neck carrying in gold tiny pieces resembling the five weapons of Vishnu — conch, discus, club, bow and sword — as a guard against evil.

10. The river of Ayodhya.

3. THE CITY

That great city, Ayodhya,
Has won the praise of all the men,
Sole masters of the good and sweet –
Rich masters in subtle and winsome words –
And the poets in the Sanskrit tongue.
It could induce even those
Who had attained the heaven of heavens –
Sought with penance earnestly
By everyone in every world —
To come down and dwell in it. (93)

How shall I describe that city?
As the face of the goddess of the Earth?
The beauty spot on her brow?
Or her very eye?
Her auspicious marriage-string?
The necklace of gems on her breast?
The chamber of her life?
Her beloved lotus flower?
Her husband's chest with its gems?
Vaikuntham, his heaven of heavens?
Or the ultimate refuge
When all the world is dissolved? (94)

Neither he whose half is Uma[1]
Nor the one husband to two wives[2]
Nor patient Brahma on his lotus
Could ever discover its equal.
Hence it is that the sun and the moon,
Their eyes unwinking circle the heavens
In the hope that *they* may succeed
In that hopeless task! (95)

Indra's town and Kubera's
Were but the apprentice work
To create this beautiful city
Which Brahma undertook.
The divine architects
Maya and others
Seeing this city with its tall crests
Were themselves so crest-fallen
That they gave up their craft —
How then can I describe it? (96)

"Those who do good," say the Vedas,
"Enter Heaven." And who ever on earth
Has done good except for Rama?
If hence he ruled the seven worlds
So sweetly with his virtues rare
How can one call any place
Other than this the heaven of bliss? (97)

The lotus-eyed, the sure refuge
  Of those by grace and virtue led
Who have triumphed over the foes within
  And with penance and wisdom are replete —
Was born here and ruled here
  With Lakshmi for unnumbered aeons:
Which golden city of the gods
  Can compare with this of the earth? (98)

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1. Siva

2. Subrahmanya or less probably Vishnu.

All kings, all ornaments and gems,
Elephants, horses and chariots,
Gods and sages, Yakshas, Vidyadharas
Resorted here. Since so it was
Can anything, tell me, compete with it? (99)

Four square and built according to rules,
None in the snow-clad mountain group
Could rival it — hence no comparison.
But if one must be found, the golden walls
Of its forts were as high
As the fruitful reach of its learned men,
Or higher than the highest. (100)

Like the Vedas infinite,
Like the gods the sky its haunt,
Like the sages secretive
Self-contained and self-controlled,
Like Durga on her antlered deer
It played the part of a protector,
And like Kali held a trident
(To draw away the lightning's stroke).
Its greatness was like all things great,
Like God it was inaccessible. (101)

It seemed to rise into the sky
  To find out for itself
If the denizens of heaven were as lovely
  As Ayodhya's winsome maids,
With their lotus feet which were painted red,
  Their nails white as the moon,
Their tendril waists, their cocoanut breasts,
  Their shoulders rounded bamboos. (102)

The fortress was like its kings,
  Its measures models for others,
Destroying the enemies' crowns
  And observing all the codes;
Strong in its guardianship,
  Using spear, sword and bow,

Expert in strategy
  Invincible in might
And beyond access high –
  A world-dominator! (103)

That fort was filled with angry spears,
Murderous swords, discuses, bows,
Battle-axes, clubs and javelins;
Stones from slings noisy like thunder,
Numerous machines that could deal
With clouds of mosquitoes, fast fliers
Like Garuda,[3] the wind, and the thought
Of evil-minded men –
If these were its contents, why say more? (104)

To the kings of the solar race
Fame was the supreme jewel.
Their virtue guarded all things living
And dispersed the gloom of the world.l
Their wheel and sceptre crossed the sky
And extended through the earth --
And so this fortress seemed to be
A mere ornament. (105)

Let me now describe the ditch
Which surrounded that fortress
Like the billowy sea the Sakkaravala[4] –
Going low like a prostitute's mind,
It was turbid like bad poetry,
Inaccessible like a virgin's middle,
And full of alligators
Like rebellious senses which lead astray. (106)

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3. The golden eagle, vehicle of Vishnu.

4. A huge mountain according to the Puranas, beyond the seven seas but surrounded by the Ocean.

A cloud wandering with its mates in the sky
Seeing the endless ditch below
Will take it for the fearful sea
And absorb its waters; and when it sees
The fortress approaching the sky
Take that for a hill, and tired
Pause and pour itself as rain! (107)

The lotuses in those ditches outside
Were a forest of fragrant flowers
Assembled to assault those women's faces
Which had earlier vanquished them! (108)

The crocodiles rising in those ditches
Made by breaking the rocks there
Were like headstrong elephants sunk
In a boat-strewn sea, now coming up. (109)

Their sharp tails shaking, their teeth a-glitter
Each one of them like a crescent moon,
Eyes burning in wrath, these crocodiles
Chased each other like Rakshasas. (110)

That ditch was like the king's army —
The swans in it his white umbrellas,
The crocodiles his Meru-like[5] elephants,
The waves of lotuses his horses,
And the swordfish and carps
his swords and spears. (111)

Pials of silver were raised at its rim,
Gold plates between, the pavement of crystal
Making it difficult even for the gods
To say which was water and which crystal! (112)

That long, deep ditch so like the sea
Was surrounded by a grove like a forest
Like the darkness enclosing our world
Or like a blue raiment on that golden fort. (113)

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5. Meru, a mountain and the seat of the gods.

That city had four entrances
Each like the elephant guarding that quarter
And reaching up to the very sky
Which Vishnu's feet had so swiftly measured.
Like the Vedas they regulated
All things created by rule. (114)

A painted pigeon in its turret
Attracting a real bird,
The latter cooed to by his love
Would not go and embrace her —
Whereupon the offended bird
Took refuge in a kalpaka tree
In golden heaven, which only those
Can reach who have done a lot of penance. (115)

The chaplet of that city's tower [6]
Consisted of gems cut and set
Row upon row, crystals in front,
And fixed on a bright gold plate on high.
Over this were silver rafters
Fixed tight with pillars of diamonds
All which made the tiara. (116)

On the pillars was a supporting piece
In the shape of a lotus
Made of emeralds and spotless diamonds
On top of which was a gold plate
Shaped like lions bearing on their heads
Rafters made of onyxes. (117)

Thereon came the kodakam
(The ornamental curves of a crown)
With seven large places, enough space
For denizens of the seven heavens —

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6. An addendum in Sri Gopalakrishnamacharya's annotated edition of this Kandam draws attention to architectural details in this and the next two stanzas.

Towers made according to rule
Their brightness striking the upper regions.
This was fitted with a supreme knob
Which made the tower look as it were
A crown for the young Goddess of the Earth. (118)

The houses stuccoed with burnt white conches
Threw the moonlight into the shade
And whenever there was a big breeze
They billowed like the waves of the milky sea. (119)

The golden plates on the mansions
Where spotted doves came to rest
Were like the rays of the morning sun
On a mountain of silver. (120)

There were countless crores of emerald beams
Set without fault on diamond pillars
And with sculptured figures looking like real
They made the gods wonder
 if this was their land. (121)

There were countless crores of palaces
With moonstone floors and sandalwood pillars,
Coral supports for ruby beams
And sturdy walls of sapphire. (122)

The pillars with their lotus feet[7]
Inviting men to embrace them
Subtly crafted, middles slight
Covered with gold were like courtesans. (123)

Those who entered these dwellings —
Their eyes unwinking to take in their beauty,
Their bodies shining with *their* lustre —
Looked like gods, and the dwellings
Like heavenly chariots which could fly at will! (124)

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7. Pedestals carved to resemble lotuses.

Filled with things of beaten gold
The brightness of that virgin town
Was like lightning, flames, the sun
And gave heaven its golden sheen. (132)

The bright round sun in the sky
Broad at rising, small at noon,
And broad again in the evening
Should be deemed but as the shadow
Of Queen Ayodhya with her gold and gems. (133)

The clouds sucking up the smoke
Of the dark *akhil* used by the women
To dry their hair on the tops of mansions
Made the very sea sweet-smelling —
Why talk of the smell of the rains they shed? (134)

The teenager's lisp sweet as a flute;
A young woman's speech soft as a lute;
The mature woman's pleasant voice
Like the music of the toddy-sellers
Were all to be heard in that city. (135)

The pits dug by irate elephants
Were filled by the boys playing in them
With the scented powder which they wore. (136)

Girls playing balls lost their pearls
Which their numerous servants gathered in heaps,
And their whiteness put to shame
The cool whiteness of the moon. (137)

Maidens danced in theatres
And pierced the hearts of youngmen
With their lance-like eyes;
While the bodies of those youngmen
Waned like the maidens' waists
Their longings waxed and grew. (138)

Must poured in a triple stream
  from mountainous elephants
And kept the fire-eyed lion and his mate
  in their cave;
That rain made pits in the earth where it fell
And beflagged chariots fell in those pits! (147)

The garlands discarded by those seeking new ones
Were a hindrance to the anklets of dancers;
And their breasts' sandal-paste discarded by
  the women
Made the runners in the street slide and slip. (148)

Horses with their tireless hoofs
Raising the dust in the streets
Hid the gems which fell there;
And drops of honey from their riders' garlands
Brought the gems to light again! (149)

The must of the elephants smelt like *vengai*;[8]
The maiden's mouths smelt like the lotus;
Brightness rayed from the citizens' jewels
And women's tresses smelt of flowers. (150)

Apart from its generosity,
When the sheer opulence of this city's shops
Put Alagapuri[9] to shame,
Why speak of Amaravati[10]
Not listed with this among great cities?[11] (151)

Where youngmen met in that city
The heroes' anklets made a nosie,

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8. The Kino tree (Winslow).

9. The city of Kubera, the god of wealth, where no question of any generosity arose.

10. The city of Indra, king of heaven.

11. Seven cities are listed as capable of giving moksha (salvation). Ayodhya, Madura, Maya, Kasi, Kanchi, Avanti and Dwaraka. Indra's city is not one of that seven.

Singing songs and hearing them,
Bathing, dancing, decked with flowers. (158)

Some men in that great city
Spent their time riding elephants,
Prancing horses and chariots,
And giving relief to the poor. (159)

Some people in that broad city
Set elephant against elephant,
Practised with bows and other arms,
Galloped on horses in broad streets
And specialised in weaponry. (160)

Some women in that bright city
Spent their time in flower gardens,
Sported fawn-like with young men,
Went out to bathe, drank toddy –
Their red lips pallid with the drink –
And sent their lovers billet-doux. (161)

The flags on that city's deathless mansions
Seemed to drain the Milky Way
As white clouds racing in the sky
Rush down to drain what the sea contains. (162)

The gateways with their big arches
And the three fortress walls of gold
Towered and crowded into the sky
Putting the very gods to shame
Like Ayodhya's kings with their
  hill-like shoulders. (163)

Forests and fields and ditches like the sea,
Pools for the women, hills and waterfalls,
High terraces, *pandals* decked with pearls
And groves with bees humming like the vina
Provided beds of flowers and leaves. (164)

In that city, drums beating all day
Shaming the rain-clouds and the sea,
There were no guards because there were
  no thieves
And none ever gave because none ever took. (165)

Since no one in that city ever stopped learning
None was ignorant and none fully learned;
Since all alike had all the wealth
None was poor and none was rich. (166)

Out of the seed – the love of learning –
Arose in time the trunk of knowledge
Sending out branches of enquiry
With flourishing leaves of hard penance;
Love the bud, virtue the blossom
And the ripened fruit of happiness. (167)

4. THE KING

The ruler of that famous city
  Was the king of kings
Whose righteous sceptre held sole sway
  Over all the seven worlds[1] –
Virtue incarnate, the father
  Of this story's peerless hero
Rama with his warrior's anklet
  Beautiful and strong. (168)

The primal sense, grace, virtue, calm,
Spotless valour, generosity, rectitude –
The traits other kings had but in half
In him alone were found in full. (169)

In this ancient sea-girt earth
No hand was found unwetted by his gifts;[2]
Neither was there any yaga
Fit for a King he had not performed. (170)

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1. The seven islands of which this world consists.

2. Ritual gifts were always given sprinkled with water.

A mother in his love, a fruitful penance,
A son who opens their way to his parents,[3]
A balm in disease, a sharp intellect
In understanding a crabbed text —
Such were the thoughts the King invoked. (171)

The sea of suppliants he crossed by giving;
The sea of learning by ceaseless study;
The sea of enemies with his weapons;
Of wealth and pleasure by enjoyment. (172)

That Emperor with his sword and scabbard
Named Dasaratha, of deathless fame
So ruled that even birds, beasts and rivers
And women of easy-virtue ran within bounds. (173)

Mountains his fortress walls, seas his ditch
Hills his palaces full of precious gems
All the world was Ayodhya to him
Which he ruled as he ruled that city. (174)

He rubbed the rust off his lances
Against possible enemies
And the gem-set crowns of those enemy princes
Rubbed the rust off his golden anklets. (175)

His parasol a constant moon
Providing coolth, light and shade
Made the inconstant moon above
Wholly unnecessary! (176)

A lion decked in diamonds
He guarded all lives as if himself
So that each thing, moving and steadfast
Felt as if lodged in his sole body. (177)

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3. The manes depend on their progeny for their ascent to heaven or well-being after their death.

The victory wheel of that great king
With his shoulders high as the hills
Was like the sun up in the sky
Alone, covering every spot
And guarding each individual life. (178)

With no foes boar-like to attack him,
His shoulders rounded like kettledrums:
He ruled his kingdom with the ease
A poor man runs his farm. (179)

5. THE DIVINE DESCENT

One day the king bowed to that sage
Who was Brahma's equal in purity
And said, "For my ancient family,
"You are father and mother, boons, God and all!" (180)

"My ancestors ruled over this earth
Undimmed, brighter than the sun;
Through your grace I have enjoyed
Reigning over this boundless world. (181)

"Sixteen thousand years have gone,
And my foes all down, I have ruled this earth.
I lack nothing but am worried
About its state when I am gone. (182)

"The sages with their hard penances
And Brahmins living well so far
Will after me face a lot of trouble –
This is the pain which wrings my heart." (183)

When the Emperor with his crown of pearls,
His palace resounding with beat of drums,

Spoke these words, there came to the mind
Of the son of the God of the Lotus Throne [1] (184)

The promise made to the distressed gods,
By that blue hill on the endless snake
In his wakeful sleep rocked by the sea,
"I will save you from their tyranny." (185)

Defeated by the cruel Titans
Those gods had sought the Blue-necked one, [2]
But that great God, all-knowing, said,
"I can't help you", and went with them. (186)

Reaching the stainless, jewelled dome
Blazing on top of the northern mount [3]
He bowed to the feet of the Four-faced God
And narrated the tyranny of those thorns
in their flesh. (187)

The Blessed One on the lotus told
Uma's husband at great length
How he had rescued Indra that day
When that bully bellowing like a cloud [4]
Took him a prisoner bound to Lanka. (188)

"Against those twenty arms, ten heads
Of the graceless tyrant, we are helpless all,
Unless that rain-cloud, sea of mercy,
Pities us and fights him" was their thought. (189)

Their flower-palms folded, they prayed
with their hearts
To that jade mountain asleep on the sea —

1. Vasishtha, son of Brahma and the family priest.

2. Siva, referred to as Uma's husband in 189 below.

3. Meru.

4. Ravana's son, Meghanada ("thundering") who acquired the name Indrajit ("conqueror of Indra") by this exploit.

The Divinity on the ocean of milk —
And he, the unfailing to his suppliants. (190)

Riding his Garuda appeared before them
Like a dark cloud bearing lotuses,
Two blazing torches, one on each side,
On a red-gold hill, his flower-queen with him. (191)

They rose, the King of the gods, and he
Who loved to rest on his lotus throne
Welcomed him, fell at his feet with the others,
And bowing and bowing quivered ecstatic. (192)

They sang and danced, ran hither and thither,
Their senses lost as if with toddy
Exultant that the Titans were finished,
And crowned themselves with basil sprigs. (193)

A rain-cloud descending a golden mount
My Lord alighted from the Alwar's shoulders,[4]
Entered a hall which touched the sky
And seated himself on a burnished throne. (194)

Brahma, the sages and the gods,
And he with the axe and crescent moon[5]
Exultant at their nearness to him
Told the tyrant's burning tyrannies. (195)

"Lord of Lakshmi, the brutal strength
Of the ten-headed Titan, his brother and the rest
Has deprived the earth and heaven of penance
And we are utterly lost," they said,
and sighed. (196)

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4. Garuda, Vishnu's mount, referred to as one of Vishnu's great devotees

5. Siva.

"Because of the great boons got from us
Wherever these Titans find their way
They have destroyed in all three worlds
Untackled, in a moment they
will gobble up all!" (197)

Said they, in sorrow submerged, and bowed
And he with the fragrant basil decked
Said, "Grieve not, I shall cut off
their heads
And relieve the earth. One thing
you must hear. (198)

"All those who are now here in heaven,"
Said that ocean of grace, his face all smiles,
"Should descend as monkeys, and in droves
Inhabit forests, groves and hills. (199)

"I myself will alight on earth
As Dasaratha's son with his sea of an army
And pulverise with my deadly shafts
That mirage, the Titans' boons and days. (200)

"My conch and discus and my bed wide-spread
With a deadlier venom than a volcano
Shall come as brothers at my command[6]
And we will enter Ayodhya." (201)

When he said this they leapt up
Sang songs of thanks and good import,
"The God who wears our garden basil
Has saved us today," they said in joy. (202)

"Our grief is gone," said Indra delighted,
Lotus-set Brahma, and the Crescent-crested;
And those in far distant skies
Said, "Ended is our humiliation." (203)

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6. The three will appear respectively as Satrughna, Bharata and Lakshmana, the bed wide-spread being the thousand-headed Adi Sesha.

After my Lord departed on Garuda,
Grandfather Brahma told the gods,
"I am already the king of bears
You too likewise go down to the earth." (204)

Said then the king of the heavenly tree,
"Vali and his son shall bear
My part, and to their enemies
Be as thunder;" and the Sun God said,
"I will be Vali's younger brother,"
"And Nila I," the Fire god said. (205)

When the god of Wind said, "My own part
  Maruti shall take,"
The others said that they would all
  Be born as monkeys fierce.
Siva said, "I too shall have
  A share in the Wind's son."
Who could have laid a limit then
  To the gods from different quarters? (206)

Thus through the grace of the lotus-eyed God
Brahma on his flower, Siva dark-necked
And all other gods became monkeys on earth
In frightful forests, and the donors
All went back to their abodes. (207)

This was what the sage recalled;
And "O doughty King," he said,
"Don't grieve. Perform a sacrifice
Free from faults. Your cares will end
And you will get such sons as will guard
Our own seven worlds and the seven above." (208)

When the great sage said this
  The Emperor arose
And with exceeding joy
  Fell at his feet.
"With you for my refuge
  How can sorrow be mine?
Tell me the steps I should take
  To perform this rite." (209)

"Kashyapa the Sage begot
  The spotless Suras and others;
His son Vibandaga was such
  That even Siva could praise him;
In knowledge of the Vedas
  And other things well-considered
His son was like his father,
  Illustrious, grace-endowed. (210)

"That great sage, stag-horned,
  Expert in Manu's laws
And other works which expound
  The very essence of truth –
The equal of Brahma himself
  Unknowing of the world and its ways
Unversed in its varied forms
  Rishyasringa must be asked
To come for that sacrifice. (211)

"A great ascetic in whose eyes
  All humans are but beasts
Dwelling on this earth of ours
  Borne by the many-headed snake;
Deserving well the praise
  Of Brahma and of Siva –
Should he conduct this sacrifice
  You shall have sons," he said. (212)

Thus, by these words informed,
  The King of this earth's Kings
Bowed to the lotus feet
  Of that worthy sage.
"Tell me, Lord," he said,
  Where dwells that victorious soul,
That immaculate doer of penance
  That I may fetch him here." (213)

"There was a king of Manu's race
  Well fitted to guard the world –
Uttanapada, a monarch crowned

Not easy to overcome;
The abode of love and mercy
To whom was born a child
To escape the hell for sonless men –
The king Romapada. (214)

"For a long time in Romapada's land
No clouds arose, no lightning was seen,
And the distress was unrelieved:
And even when the King gave
Large gifts to learned sages
The sky held back, and he was told
That there would be rain only if
The stag-horn Rishi came to his land. (215)

"As he wondered how he could bring
That great sage immaculate
To whom all men on this sea-girt earth
Were in no way different from beasts,
Some women of easy virtue came –
Dazzling brows and long, black eyes
Red lips, red mouth, pearl teeth, soft breasts –
Who bowed and said, 'We will fetch him here.' (216)

"When they said this, the King was pleased
And gave them jewels, clothes and things;
And said, 'Your brows shame the crescent,
Your shoulders resemble rounded bamboos;
Slender waists, big breasts, dark tresses,
Timid eyes, you red-lipped tendrils,
Go,' and they bowed to him
And went in the chariots supplied to them. (217)

"They went many leagues, but when they came
Within a league of that sage's hut
Those women decked in gold set up
A hut which they entered
like sages themselves. (218)

"Those women with their large, black eyes
Went to the sage when his father
wasn't there;

And he thinking that they too like him
Were sages who thought that
all men were beasts
Showed them the usual courtesies. (219)

"He offered them a seat and water
And after hearing his words of welcome
Those red-lipped women rose abruptly,
Bowed to the sage, and left for their hut. (220)

"Some days after, those gem-decked women
Brought fruits sweeter than ambrosia,
Jack-fruit, mango, banana and cocoanut
And said, 'Rare sage, be pleased to eat these.' — (221)

"After many days like this
Those women begged the spotless sage
To visit them, and thus entreated
He willingly went along with them. (222)

"Exulting, and also afraid
Those women, expert in having their way,
Kept telling the sage, 'It is here,'
'It is here,'
And led the innocent a long, long way. (223)

"Even as that sage came to the city
The clouds grew dark like Siva's neck[7]
And the rain came splashing down in torrents
And filled all tanks and rivers to the brim. (224)

"When rivers and tanks overflowed,
Sugarcane and paddy sprang up,
Dark clouds in the sky spread unceasing,
And welcome water poured down. (225)

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7. Siva swallowed the terrible poison which rose out of the ocean when it was churned for ambrosia. The poison stayed in his neck, coloring it a deep blue.

"The King guessed that those women's strategy --
Red mouth, lotus face, pearl teeth,
And soft tresses, dark and fragrant --
Had made that great sage arrive there
Who had conquered lust, ire and delusion. (226)

"Surrounded by his learned sages
And his army, he went two leagues
And saw before him the towering ascetic
Midst those women fragrant-haired. (227)

"Eyes filled with tears he fell at his feet
Happy that at last he lived,
And said to the women bowing to him,
'Your strategy has ended my woe.' (228)

"When the ascetic saw the King and the sages
And realised that he had been tricked,
The gods were frightened, but
on the King's prayer
He held his wrath, as a sea its waves. (229)

"The King with his army of swordsmen
Bowed again and again to the sage
And said he had moved an immovable ache
Whereon his anger fled away. (230)

"The generous sage, his mind unclouded,
Exuding mercy blessed the King
And, followed by the learned rishis
Jumped into the chariot. (231)

"The King and the sage entered
A well-decked city and were welcomed;
And reaching a huge palace of gold
The sage was seated on a peerless throne. (232)

"After *arghyam* and other courtesies
Not one left for the critic,
The King gave gladly in marriage

As per Vedic rites to the sage
His daughter Shanta, flower-lipped
Her breasts tender buds! (233)

"He, O King, is in Anga land
Where the rains his advent brought down
Cured the land of its famine,
And he married and settled down there." (234)

He bowed to the sage's feet and said,
"I will bring him here at once,"
While the vassal kings bowed to *his* feet
And with Sumantra and others
He mounted his jewelled chariot
Heaven's denizens blessing him
With "Ended all our woes today"
And a shower of flowers from the sky. (235)

Horns blowing louder than the sea,
Magadars[8] singing his praises,
Vedic Brahmins blessing him,
Sweet red mouths invoking heaven,
Surrounded by a sea of soldiers
He crossed sun-like impassable ways
And reached at last the blessed land
Of Romapada that very day. (236)

Informed by his heralds of the approach
Of the King of Kings whose fame
Ran like a blazing banner ahead,
Romapada of the hero's anklet,
A sea of bowman around him,
Jewels flashing, *magadars* singing,
His joy bursting its bounds,
Came a league to welcome him. (237)

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8. A minstrel tribe.

The King of Kings stepped down
  From his car which put thunder to shame
When he saw that other king
  Welcoming fall at his feet.
His love blazing high
  He took up and embraced him;
And *he*, brimming with joy
  Asked the one with the burning lance, (238)

"Is it as a boon for my penance
  Or the penances of my land
That you whose spear saved heaven
  Have been pleased to visit me here?"
And Romapada, the strong-shouldered,
  Whose spear took his foes' souls away
Put in a jewelled car and took to his city
  The crowned and garlanded King. (239)

The King took his guest to a hall
  Bejewelled and bright as gold;
Girls beautiful as dolls
  Lotus-footed provided the music;
On a gold throne seated with deference
  The King who had saved Heaven
Enjoyed it all with relish. (240)

Served with fragrant sandal
  The chariot-king was asked,
"Tell me, Sir, I pray you,
  What has brought you here?"
He told that king his purpose
  And met with the reply,
"O King with the lofty crown
  I will take that sage to you"
Whereupon with his army
  He left for Ayodhya. (241)

After the Emperor left, the King
  Went to that Veda embodied
Twined his gem-set crown with the wreaths

Which adorned that sage's feet,
Did him due honours and being asked,
"Why have you come here?"
Said, "You must please grant me a boon,"
"And what is that?" he was asked. (242)

"You must go to jewelled Ayodhya
The city of Dasaratha the Just
The famous scion of a king
Who once ascended the scales
To save a pigeon with his own flesh --
Himself a great hero
Who with his spear has saved the gods
So often from the Titans. (243)

"That boon is granted. Order a chariot,"
said the sage;
And the King whose lance was ever bright,
ever filed
Said, "Ended is the Emperor's woe,"
brought a huge car,
And asked the sage to get in with
his wife -- which he did. (244)

Romapada bade adieu --
And girt round by sages benign,
That rishi, Veda incarnate,
Got into the car with his wife. (245)

Virtue and the heavenly beings
Beat their drums and rained choice flowers,
Glad that because of this sage's grace
The true God would come and quench all sins. (246)

Messengers ran to Ayodhya
And announced to the mighty King
The sage's arrival; and hearing it
He was plunged in a fathomless sea of joy. (247)

He rose like a spring and mounted his chariot;
There was a rain of flowers and the blessings
of sages;
Drums beat, there was varied music;
Evil uprooted fell down with a crash. (248)

"The hill of sorrow in my heart is blasted",
Said that King of Kings, his drums aroar --
Greeting that ripened soul of penance
Across three leagues with an ardent gaze. (249)

All good penances incarnate
In a body immaculate,
Clad in bark, with a stag horn
Jutting out of its forehead, (250)

Expert with his penance to end
The woes of the gods, the might of the Titans,
And carrying in his great big hands
Umbrella, jug and the three-pronged stick.[9] (251)

The King of Kings descended from his car
And fell at his two flower-like feet;
And he with his stag-horn, a very trellis
For the Vedas, blessed him in pregnant words. (252)

He welcomed with open arms
The other sages also blessing him
And brought, as was meet, in his chariot
The stag-sage and his lovely[10] wife. (253)

Wearing his crown, the sage beside him,
He reached Ayodhya that wondrous city
In two-fifths of an hour, drums beating
And flower-faced damsels invoking blessings. (254)

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9. A sanyasi carries always the two latter.

10. Lit. fish-eyed, the eyes compared to fish for their shape, gleam and movement.

Vasishtha, who had reduced the five
Lawless rogues into a zero,[11]
And the great sage rigid in virtue
Reached the King's assembly hall. (255)

He seated that Veda-like Chief of the Sages
On a jewelled chair in that splendid hall,
Did him the honours pleasingly
And then spoke the following words: (256)

"Noblest of noble, burning bright
With dharma, purity and penance,
Through your grace my ancient family
Will ever be kings, my deeds bear fruit." (257)

The sage looked pleased to hear this.
"Listen, King of Kings," he said,
"With the great Vasishtha for your help
Which king on earth can rival you?" (258)

He spoke many more sweet words like this,
And said, "Rock shoulders bow-bedecked
Did you get me here today
For the fruitful horse-sacrifice?" (259)

"Lacking nothing all these years
I have ruled this world without distress;
But I have no sons -- grant me now such
As will sway this sea-girt earth with fame." (260)

He said, and "King, don't grieve,"
said the sage,
You shall have sons to rule with skill
Not this world only but all fourteen --
Start here and now the great yaga for that." (261)

---

11. The five senses, the enemies within us ever leading us astray.

Quickly were brought the plough and tools
For that sacrifice, and the King of Kings
Entered after a ritual bath
The field prepared according to the Vedas. (262)

The three fires lit and kept aflame
By sacred offerings twice six months,
Drums beating, the serene skies were thick
Crowded by the gods, no space unfilled. (263)

Their lotus faces aswarm, the gods
Showered fragrant *karpaka*[12] flowers,
And that eminent staghead-sage
Poured in the fire the son-giving ghee. (264)

Quickly arose from that fire
A geni -- red eyes, flaming hair --
Carrying on a plate of gold
A ball of rice ambrosial-sweet. (265)

The geni placed it on the earth
And went on its way. And the sage
  told the King,
"Give this ambrosia to your wives
In proper order as is fit." (266)

Conches blowing, the King of Kings
Gave a part as the sage prescribed
To Kausalya, the bright and comely,
Her soft curls fragrant, lips *Kovvai*[13]-red. (267)

Likewise to the gods' acclamation,
The Emperor of Kosala
With its swan-filled pools, rivers and groves,
Placed a part in the hands of Kekayan's daughter. (268)

---

12. A heavenly tree identified with the cocoanut palm.

13. A red fruit.

He who was born in the race of Nimi
Whose virtues made his enemies tremble
Likewise dealt with Sumitra,
And Indra huzzahed,[14] "Finished my foe!" (269)

That generous King gathered thereon
The spilt remains, and to Sumitra gave them --
And his foes' left sides, and the others' right
Trembled, boding evil and good. (270)

After that horse-sacrifice
And the one for the raising of sons
Were performed with care by the sage,
The King belauded arose with joy. (271)

The Vedic rites of these yagas over,
Loud music arose with *mridangam*.
Out of its darkness the world emerged,
And the King went to his audience hall. (272)

Discharging his duties without fault
As set down by the holy books
To God and to the heavenly beings
He rained with his hands gold to the Brahmins. (273)

Wealth and chariots, horses, and clothes
Were given to vassal kings as fit,
And as numerous instruments played
He went to Sarayu for his bath. (274)

Drums beat, parasols white and pearled
Provided a shade, and surrounded by kings
He reached his court making Brahma jealous,
Touched his guru's feet, and rose up blessed. (275)

---

14. Because Sumitra's son Lakshmana will put an end to the life of Indrajit, Ravana's son, who had taken Indra captive and humiliated him -- hence his name.

Commanded by that rare sage
He fell too at the staghead's feet,
Spoke many sweet and fitting words
And said, "I am saved, what more can I have?" (276)

"Lord, your grace has saved me alive,
Removed all impediments;"
And that sage, happy at heart,
Blessed him, and rode with the others away. (277)

His sorrows removed, again the King
Fell at the feet of the worthy sages,
And got their blessings and their praise --
They went pleased, and the King rested. (278)

After some days the three matrons
Felt the sickness of pregnancy,
And not their lovely faces alone
But their entire bodies grew wan
like the moon. (279)

When the proper time arrived,
To the great delight of the goddess Earth
The star *punarpusam*[15] in conjunction
With the zodiac sign of Cancer, (280)

The siddhas, yakshas and their wives,
The vidyadharas and the heavenly folks,
The nityas row on row acclaiming,
The God of Dharma at peace at last, (281)

The great Kausalya to the world's gain
Gave birth to that dazzling splendour,
The inscrutable rain-cloud which once
Had hidden in its stomach all the worlds.[16] (282)

---

15. The seventh lunar mansion, Castor and Pollux with Capella.

16. The universe is the creation of Brahma who himself came out of the navel of Vishnu.

Indra and the other gods
Shouting jubilant in the sky,
Kekaya's daughter bore her child
When Pusa[17] conjoined with the Fish. (283)

Indra and his kin on high --
He who the mountains' wings lopped off --
Jubilant danced when the younger queen,
Cancer joining the Serpent-star[18]
Brought the younger hero[19] forth. (284)

Her eyes venom-dark she yielded again,
Makam[20] joining with the Lion,
This earth borne by the many-headed snake
And the holy scriptures dancing with joy. (285)

The nymphs danced, the kinnaras sang,
Instruments twanged in the seven-note scales;
Joyful at the thought of the Titans' fall
The heavenly beings gambolled free! (286)

The maids with their glad news ran to the King
And danced with joy, while astrologers
Cast up the course of the planets and stars
And were happy that the world's woes were over. (287)

The King of Kings with the great sage
Went to the sacred stream to bathe,
White conches blowing, dispersed due gifts
And scanned the faces of the princes. (288)

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17. The eighth lunar asterism.

18. The ninth lunar asterism.

19. Lakshmana.

20. The tenth lunar asterism.

"Proclaim by drum-beat", said the great King,
"No taxes for seven and seven more years;
Our full treasuries left unbolted,
The needy shall take what they want,
how they will. (289)

"All wars shall cease; the kings shall go
Each one to his land, taking his leave;
The priests shall perform their duties
unblemished,
And fairs and feasts held on all sides. (290)

"Renovate temples, set in order
The plots for yagas where streets meet
Making squares and triangles,
morning and night
Worship the gods with garlands and incense." (291)

Thus ordered the drummers announced the news
From elephants; and the city folk
Youngmen and women with lightning waists
Plunged in a fathomless sea of joy. (292)

They hurrahed row on row, with love
Their bodies shivered and perspired;
They gave rich gifts to the news-bearers --
They must have guessed that God had come. (293)

In that broad and lovely city
Crowds of people, friends, playmates,
Scattered on the streets in their boundless joy
Sandal-paste, ghee, saffron and scents. (294)

Thus for twice six days in that town
The people in their excessive joy
Knew not themselves; and the rigorous sage
Gave thought to the names which he should give. (295)

To the True Being the Elephant invoked
In his weary struggle with the Crocodile

Trumpeting, "You on your serpent-bed!"[21]
He gave the name of Rama. (296)

He who knew the Vedas' essence
Clear as a gooseberry on one's palm,
The boon-giver greeted the next splendour
With the name of Bharata. (297)

"The cheats shall perish, the gods revive;
The goddess of Earth lose all her griefs --
The might immovable of this splendour
Shall bear the name of Lakshmana. (298)

"And this splendour, a pearl incarnate
With lotuses blossoming out of it,
Which will vanquish enemies on each hand
Shall be known as Satrughna." (299)

When that sage who never erred
In this manner gave those names,
The King filled the sea, his learned Brahmins,
With the rivers of wealth which flowed down
his hands. (300)

The Emperor of all the world
Thought his life and soul were
one and the same
As his who was so like a picture
Of flowers unrivalled, blue and red. (301)

Their lisps ambrosial, walks unsteady
Like the sun dispelling the darkness around,
As if the Vedas had found their voice,
The four sons grew up for the earth's relief. (302)

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21. The reference is to the story in the Bhagavata Purana in which Gajendra the Elephant caught by a crocodile cries to Vishnu for help.

The sage who resembled moon-crested Siva
Arranged for their tonsure and initiation,
And with his unlimited learning
Taught the pure Vedas and eternal arts. (303)

The divine Rama with his brothers learnt
Elephant, horse and chariot riding,
Archery, the use of deadly weapons,
And all other proper exercises. (304)

The Vedic sages and the gods,
Earth and those who dwelt in that city
Said, "Never will we part from these prince
Come to save us from our past deeds." (305)

The Chieftain and his younger brother
Roamed the rivers, dark groves and tanks
Showing the earth's blessedness
Like shuttle and thread inseparable. (306)

Bharata and his younger brother
Never apart for a single second
On horse, in chariot or learning the Vedas,
Were just like Rama and Lakshmana. (307)

The elder and the younger brothers
Went to the sages in their groves,
And returning in the evening
Were welcomed like rain by thirsting crops. (308)

All the women of that city,
Their doughty husbands and their kin
Prayed to the gods within their hearts
Like the King and his Queens for these
children's weal. (309)

To a cloud from the sea lotus-laden
They likened Rama the inscrutable
Even to the Vedas, and his brother
To Meru the golden mount in the north. (310)

When he saw them, my good lord,
His face ablossom full of love
Would ask about their work and problems,
Their wives, their children's cleverness
and strength. (311)

And they quite properly would reply,
"With you, Sir, to reign over us
We have no care. Till Brahma ceases,
Rule us and all the seven worlds." (312)

Thus did He, chief god of the three,[22]
Dwell in beautiful Ayodhya,
Its citizens giving their heartfelt praise,
The young heroes, his brothers,
under his shade. (313)

---

22. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

Note: The Gopalakrishnamachariyar text, accepted also by the Kamban Kazhaham, makes Siva along with the other gods seek the help of Brahma and Vishnu against the wickedness of the Rakshasas. The Annamalai University publication text thinks that this is a Vaishnavite and sectarian interpolation. I have no wish to enter into this controversy.

6. THE HANDING OVER

All earth under his sole umbrella,
Drums blaring his victory,
Submerged in a sea of joy,
Lauded by his sages, the King (314)

Brightened by his presence one day
His jewelled council hall
Sky-neighbouring, making the gods
Wonder if it was their own palace! (315)

The charanas who roam the heavens
Seeing him seated on his throne
Could be sure that he wasn't Indra
Only as they missed the thousand eyes![1] (316)

To him, a seated lion, appeared,
The irate sage who once had said

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1. Indra, King of Heaven had his entire body covered with eyes. Vide verse 472 and the note to it.

That he would make another world
With all things in it, and a new Brahma![2] (317)

When he came, the King received him,
His necklace putting the sun to shame,
As Indra, Heaven's king, would have welcomed
Creator Brahma, lotus-throned. (318)

He put him on a seat of gold
Set with jewels closely packed,
Worshipped his pair of lotus feet,
And said, "I am rid of my past today. (319)

"Great sage, that you should have come here
For me to go round and worship you
Is the fruit of the good deeds performed
Not by me or my land but my ancestors." (320)

"When sages like me," he replied,
"And gods are beset with hindrances,
Where, victorious King, whose spear
Is fleshed in foemen hard to quell,
Can we seek refuge except
The snowy range which laughs to scorn
All others,[3] or the sea of milk,[4]
Or Brahma's land, or Indra's town,
Or your own city Ayodhya
With its golden terraces? (321)

When Indra lost his unbrageous land
And took refuge under your umbrella,
Did you not out of pity for him
Kill doughty Sambaran, kith and kin,
And restore to Indra the realm he rules?" (322)

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2. Vide verse 596.

3. Mt. Kailasa, the abode of Siva.

4. Vishnu's residence.

His heart flooded with a sea of joy,
The King at whose gate drums echoed ever,
Said, "I have reaped the fruit of my
kingship --
Be pleased to tell me what I should do." (323)

"That demons hinder not my yaga
Like lust and rage which ascetics shun,
Lend me that dark and handsome Prince
Out of your four to fight and guard,"
Said he piercing the King's heart
As if he was Death demanding his life. (324)

When those words of the great sage
Entered his ears like a burning brand
Thrust into a spear-caused wound,
The King with the unfailing lance
Felt his life swing on a thread
And was like one that was born blind
Gaining his sight and losing it again! (325)

His sorrow a little assuaged, the King
Said, "Great Sir, he is a boy, untrained
If this is your command let me offer myself:
Should Siva with Ganga in his matted hair,
Indra, and the four-faced Brahma
Themselves should hinder, I will hinder them --
Get up and start the great yaga." (326)

He said, and hearing it rose in wrath
The sage who once had created a world.
"Is this the end?" wondered the gods;
The sun grew dark, things fixed revolved;
His beetling brow bespread his forehead;
He guffawed, his eyes grew red, the world
Darkened in every direction. (327)

Vasishtha knowing his angry mind
Begged forbearance and said to the King,

"Will you stand in the way of your son
Getting gifts else not possible?" (328)

"Sir, today the time has come
For arts and crafts innumerable
To reach your son, as floods released
By unceasing rain reach the sea." (329)

Obeying his guru's advice
The King said, "Bring the Prince here."
And he, the wise one, came at once
When informed of the King's command. (330)

The king showed him and his younger brother
To that Vedic sage, and said to him,
"You Sir, are their father and mother,
Take charge of them and do as you deem." (331)

The sage who was free from all evil,
His anger gone, accepted the boys,
Blessed the King, and bent on his yaga
Started on his journey by foot. (332)

Rama girded on his sword
And on his hill-like shoulders placed
Two quivers of arrows unfailing like Truth,
And bore his bow as he bore the world! (333)

With his brother armed likewise
He left that golden city's walls
Following the sage like his shadow --
The King's dear life on a journey abroad! (334)

They left that city behind unrivalled
By seats of bliss obtained by penance
And reached the river Sarayu
With its swans like dancers ankleted. (335)

They stayed in a grove full of bees
Black like the soft hair of maids

With tender breasts like lotus buds
Into which a canal ran
With honey dripping from sugarcanes. (336)

When the sun-god's seven green steeds
Came up the mountain in the East
Which with huge clouds resting on it
Looked like an elephant with a skull cap,
They rose and forded the great river. (337)

Seeing a grove out of which rose
The smoke of sacrifice loved by the gods,
Great Rama bowed to the divine sage
And asked, "What kind of grove is this?" (338)

7. TATAKA KILLED

"This is where Kama, the God of Love
Shot his shaft at the Crescent-Crest[1]
And, burnt by the fire out of his forehead,
Lost for ever his silk-cotton body! (339)

"Veda-versed, since by Siva's wrath
Kama's *angas*[2] were scattered here,
This place is known as Angaland
And this hermitage as Kamashram. (340)

"If here that God himself did penance
Whom all those seek who aim at the lore
That will end attachment and rebirth,
Can words of ours size up its purity?" (341)

Thus told by the sage they passed that night
In wonder with the pious folk who
  welcomed them;

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1. Siva always represented with a crescent moon on his head.

2. Limbs.

And the next morning, when the sun arose
From the broad hill they approached
a desert. (342)

That place lacked all other season
Except summer when the sun
Is bent on sucking the world dry
And goes on a parade with his victory flag.
Even the Fire God thinking of it
Will have his inner organs burnt,
And looking, have his eyes consumed! (343)

The tongue which talks of that desert's heat
Will burn; darkness and the sky
Enclosing it will burn; at dawn
Sunlight will burn; rain burn; and even
Thunder and lightning burn -- What won't? (344)

That heat for ever unquenchable
Was like the hearts of heroes exposed
in battle
To a rain of arrows and lances
Betrayed by weak and treacherous men
And losing the precious jewel of
their honour. (345)

All that desert land was scattered
With *ahil* wood as if split by demons,
White pearls spilt from leafless bamboos,
And red gems spilt out of venomous snakes! (346)

The earth being earth can't flee that heat;
The desert deities can't walk, only run;
Neither the sun, nor the clouds, nor the wind
Dare go directly over it. (347)

Like lightning darting from the sky
Tearing the clouds
Heat came from below; jewels shot up
Tearing the ground

As if fire and venom were spat
 Tearing Sesha's eyes,[3]
Or blood came bubbling from Earth's wounds
 Tearing her body. (348)

A trumpeting elephant heat-oppressed
 Seeking the refuge of a shade
Would step into the gaping mouth
 At a boa rolling on the ground
Tortured by heat and hunger! (349)

In that desert ruled by autocrat Agni[4]
Crows and elephants lay charred and black,
Their blackness, like the clouds',
 doubtless caused
By the fiery rays of the sun above. (350)

The mirages that appeared on that desert
However heat-oppressed within themselves
Made no attempt to rise, but lay like water
Out of pity for those in heaven. (351)

The mirage chariot of that desert
Was as it were a crystal throne
With legs of gold designed and set
For the ruler of that place, King Summer! (352)

That desert was completely free
Of pity and of compunction
Like the ascetics who would avoid
The two fates, good and evil,
And wage their war on the triple foes --
Lust, rage and delusion,
Rid of all attachment
Like women who sell their love! (353)

---

3. Sesha: Adisesha, the thousand-hooded snake which bears the earth on its head.

4. The god of fire.

Its surface burnt and split
The gravel opened a road --
An easy entrance for the fiery sunbeams
To the gem-studded snake-king's land. (354)

On reaching such a burning desert
The great ascetic thought to himself
That however strong, those flower-like
  Princes
Were bound to feel a little hurt. (355)

He gave them a look and they understood
And fell at his feet, and thereupon he
Taught them the two charms Brahma had made
Which they took at once to their minds
  and hearts. (356)

The fire which burnt more fiercely
Than the flames at the final dissolution
Thereon was cool as crystal water,
And Rama bowed to the sage and asked: (357)

"Was it Siva with his Gangā and garlands
Whose look burnt this land, or some other cause?
Why is it more barren than a land that is cursed
With a cruel tyrant? Tell me, all-knowing." (358)

"Learn of the might of one," he said,
"Who kills sweet lives and roams about,
Who looks like Death and has the strength
Of a thousand musty elephants! (359)

"If she should wish to uproot the earth,
To drink up the sea, to pierce the sky
She has the might and energy for it;
Evils unnumbered have taken the form
Of a woman, and wander in her shape. (360)

"If you can conceive a combination
Of two mountains and an innate venom,

A voice like thunder, the final fire,
Two crescents rising out of the sea --
You can see them all in her terrible form! (361)

You, with shoulders no sooner seen
Than would make all men wish they were women,
This forest-dweller with a snake-like spear
Bears the name of Tataka. (362)

"Even as clinging greed by alone
Can destroy unnumbered virtues
This cruel demoness by herself
Has made a fertile land a desert. (363)

"Under the orders of Lanka's King
She hinders my yagas, a mountain in size.
O raincloud-wreathed,[5] she moves around
Killing and eating up people in droves. (364)

"My child, she thinks that all creation
Is there only to serve for her food.
What more shall I say? In a few days
She will gobble up all that lives." (365)

Hearing the royal sage say this,
A bow instead of a conch,[6] in his hand
His honey-sweet garland lovely a-shake
"Where dwells", asked Rama, "the doer of
these deeds?" (366)

Before that sage, the self-controlled, said
To Rama that elephant calf,
"Here in this place, suddenly appeared
She herself, a smoking volcano! (367)

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5. Addressed to Rama.

6. In his present avatara of Rama, not the original Vishnu.

Her anklets made of hillocks
  So that the level earth sank,
And all the sea came rushing
  To fill the holes thus made,
While Death with his fiery eyes
  Fearless, but now cowed down
Ran and took refuge
  In caves the mountains hid --
She came rushing down
  Immovable hills in her train! (368)

Her eyebrows quivering, her mouth a cave
Out of which issued two crescent-like fangs,
The sinful demoness glared with her eyes,
Firebeams shooting out of two seas! (369)

Her waist shook with a band
  Of the trunks of musty elephants;
She made a clamour which beset
  Heaven and the far quarters;
The thunder of her noise
  Made the seven worlds tremble. (370)

She a very thunder-cloud
  Looked at them and laughed;
Looked too at the triple-headed
  Sharp Death in her hand;
Gnashed her teeth and opening
  The cavern of her mouth
Let fall from it the following
  Words of jeer and rage. (371)

"All this place is in my keep
  Too strong to overcome;
All things in it I have destroyed
  Seed and root and branch;
Is it pitying me you have come
  To offer your sweet flesh?
Or given a push from behind by Fate
  And in love with easeful death?" (372)

Her glare undid and scattered the clouds;
Her kick broke huge hills to pieces;
She ground her fangs — the moon's disc
  divided —
And aimed her spear at their hearts to kill. (373)

Though Rama knew the sage's thought
He held back his deadly shaft;
Though her frightful deed aimed at their lives
His large heart wouldn't kill a woman. (374)

Well-versed in the four Vedas, the sage
Knew the thought of the benign Prince
Unmoved by the demon's deadly intent,
Red hair and white fangs stinking of flesh. (375)

"Guilty of every sinful act
She left us alone as sapless refuse;
Save this what shall we think of her deeds?
O gorgeous Prince, is this demon a woman? (376)

"To kill a woman who shuns shame is shame;
But this woman's name will unman a man,
Reduce to impotence his strength and sword —
Who is a man then, who a woman? (377)

"Indra was defeated, gods and Titans,
Their armies crushed ran away before her;
Her shoulders like the mountain Mandara,
How does she differ from the strongest men? (378)

"Scion of that noble race
Whose wheel of virtue sways the world,
Does she who has killed all beings and virtue,
Unkilled herself, need the name of a man? (379)

"Spearman armed, reply to me —
Is there a Death more deadly than she
Who will not wait on destiny
To transport a man to the realms above

But, no sooner his flesh is smelt,
Than swoops down on him to eat him up? (380)

"What worse than this that one should gorge
Fistfuls of lives with a wide mouth?
To think of her as a dainty woman
Is only folly and cowardice. (381)

"I say all this backed by endless codes,
Not out of anger against this woman --
To be patient longer is not virtue.
Kill the demoness," said the sage. (382)

The hero heard it and said, "Sir Truth,
If need be, even a sinful thing,
Commanded by you as necessary
Is Gospel to me; obeying you virtue." (383)

She the fiery, her eyes darting fire,
Sensed the thoughts of cool Ganga's Prince
And flung at him the spear which she held,
Fire issuing from her red-hot hands. (384)

That pentecost flame, the three-pronged spear
Issuing from this smoky Death
Came down the youth attending the sage
Like the serpent, Rahu[7] on the moon. (385)

No one at that instant saw
His bow bent or arrow fixed;
They only saw broken in two
The deadly spear the demon had flung. (386)

Before a word could emerge she rained
Dark as a raincloud at dead of night
A rain of stones to fill a sea
And the hero met it with a rain of arrows. (387)

---

7. Supposed to cause the lunar or solar eclipse.

Swift as a sage's curse the burning shaft
Aimed at that night-dark woman did its work;
Her heart of stone could no more hold it in
Than a dolt's mind a wise man's learned
  words. (388)

Hit sharp by that shaft from that mountain
  of gold
Down she collapsed like a cloud from the sky
With thunder and lightning, as a storm of stones
Unloosed by the whirlwind of Dissolution. (389)

The blood from her, teeth fleshed, mouth open,
Flooded the forest covered with dust
And her fall betokened the fall of the flag-staff
Of that many-headed Titan,[8] each head with
  its crown! (390)

The deluge of blood the sharp arrow released
From her hard heart made that forest a sea.
It looked as though the flaming red
Of the evening sky had descended on the forest. (391)

That maiden battle which Rama waged
Obeying the sage, a second Brahma,
Gave Death a chance to taste a little
Titan blood, long tempting but fearful. (392)

"Our places restored," said the gods to
  the sage
"Your clogs all removed, invest the
  Prince now
With missiles divine," and drenched that hero--
A raincloud in hue, with a rainbow
  in hand--
With a rain of flowers, and went their way. (393)

---

8. Ravana, the ten-headed.

8. THE YAGA

When the gods departed, they left that place
Cool because of the rain of flowers,
And the great sage gave Rama the missiles
As sovereign and as effective
As Vennainallur Sadayan's[1] words
Are a medicine for poverty. (394)

Those mantras the tranquil rishi taught
Raised powerful spirits who rushed to Rama
As the good deeds that a man performs
Seek out and reach him in his next birth. (395)

"We have come to you, hero," the spirits said,
Never more to part from you.
We will do your bidding like a younger
  brother".
"Good", said Rama, and they became
Devoted servants of the *poovai*[2] -dark. (396)

---

1. Kamban's patron.

2. A purple flower, the same as kāyā.

Thereafter those three went a couple of leagues
And heard a great noise coming to them;
And, "Sage, what is this?" the elder asked,
And the great ascetic answered him: (397)

"It is Sarayu, the Manas-born
The Immortals hold in high esteem
With which now mingles Gomati
·And causes the great roar we hear." (398)

"What makes that river," the hero asked,
"So deserving of the gods' worship?"
And the sage answered him thus:
"Kusa, the Emperor, Brahma's son,
With victory and greatness endowed,
Begat four sons on his wife. (399)

"Of those Kusanabha had a hundred daughters,
Sweet-voiced, red-lipped and well-behaved,
Who were sporting in a grove with friends
One day, when the Wind god attracted by them (400)

"Said, 'I have been hit by Manmatha,
Sweet maidens, marry me'.
And they replied, 'Yes, when our father
Duly approached gives us in marriage' --
And the god enraged bent their backs
And those bright girls all fell down. (401)

"The God departing, those girls crawled
And went to their father and lisped to him
What had happened. And he consoled them
And married them to Suli's son. (402)

"When he, Brahmadatta, touched their hands
Their backs grew straight, they regained
  their beauty
And the King with all the world to rule
Having no sons performed a yaga.
Out of the fire in that yaga
Arose Gadi with the speed of a horse. (403)

"Giving his kingdom and crown to him
Brahmadatta went to heaven.
To Gadi were born in Mahodaya
The maid Kaushiki and me. (404)

"The King of Kings gave that soft-limbed girl
To Richika, the son of Brigu
Unrivalled even by his father.
And he well-versed in the Vedas
After a few days spent in seeking
Virtue, wealth and happiness [3]
Did great penance and reached Brahma. (405)

"Unable to bear her beloved's flight
Kaushiki turned into a river
And went to the sky. But the great sage
asked her
To go down to the earth to relieve the
earthlings
And himself entered Brahma's world. (406)

"My elder sister is this great river".
The hero and his brother told this
Were much astonished. They went further
And saw a grove and wished to know
What that cloudy grove betokened,
To which then the sage replied: (407)

"Pure as the thoughts of those women
To whom their husbands are their only God [4]
This place, listen, is where Vishnu once
Did penance -- the Lotus-eyed beyond
The knowledge of the Vedas, the gods and
others. (408)

---

3. The first three of the four purusharthas, one's aims in life.

4. Echoing a sentiment in Valluvar's Kural (55).

"Those are not foes who cause harm
But those who standing before a giver
Prevent his giving, hurt themselves too.
There is no greater harm,' he said. (423)

"He who counsels sticking to greed
Is the enemy within to those that would
Give what they have when they have it,
Following the codes, and so gaining
Fame here and bliss hereafter. (424)

'Unworthy Sukra, does it become you,
To prevent a man from giving something
Even as he gets ready to give it?
By this cruel act you and your kin
Will go about without food or clothes.' (425)

"Saying these words and convinced
That his minister was an evil man,
He dismissed his words. 'Take your three feet'
He said, and the Lord immense
Stretched his short palm for the water. (426)

"No sooner did it touch his palm
Than the dwarf despicable to his very parents
Shot up to the amazement and fear
Of all beholders, high as the heavens,
Like help given to a worthy soul. (427)

"One fixed foot measured all the earth
And spread no further, the world so small;
And the other measured all the sky
And came back, lacking more space. (428)

"Two paces measuring all the world,
For the third he found his willing head –
O bowman Rama, the basil-crowned[6]
Can make himself very small indeed! (429)

6. Vishnu.

"This is Indra's, he said and gave
The world to him, and went to his ocean.
The dark feet which had measured the world
Were massaged by Lakshmi and turned red. (430)

"O noble Prince who can give release
From deeds which make life incessant,
Fit for my yaga this is the place
Whose sight will end the cycle of birth. (431)

"It is here that I shall do my yaga",
Said he, reaching that lovely grove;
And gathering all the things he wanted
Kept the handsome Princes as guards
And commenced his sacrifice. (432)

For six days the Kings's sons
Guarded that yaga beyond thought
Meant for the denizens of heaven,
Like eyelids guarding a man's eyes. (433)

The elder of those bull-like heroes
Then said to the omniscient sage,
"Virtuous Sir, beyond all praise,
When will those cruel fiends attack us?" (434)

Vowed to silence the sage was mute.
The warrior Prince then bowed and went,
And saw the sky with dark clouds spread
And a roar which put thunder to fright! (435)

They shot and hurled, rained water and fire,
Tore mountains up and flung down hills,
Railed and ranted, swung down axes --
Not one but numerous wicked feints! (436)

The flesh-stuck weapons they flung in
  their rage
Covered the forest like summer clouds,
And the dark army of the fiends
Rose to the sky like a fish-filled sea. (437)

The bows and swords and thundering drums
With which their army filled the sky
Were like the roaring rain and storm
When the world is finally dissolved. (438)

"Teeth like fangs and mouths distorted,
Ruddy hair, eyes rolling fire,
These must be the cruel fiends
The sage expected," said Rama to his brother. (439)

That Prince saw them, and fire shot forth
From his eye's corner. He looked at the sky
And looked at his bow "You will see them,
my Lord,
Cut up and strewn," he said and bowed. (440)

"The flesh and blood of these smoky fiends
Must not fall on the yaga fire,"
Thought Rama with the lotus eyes,
And roofed it over with his arrows. (441)

Like the gods fleeing to the Crescent-Crest
When the horrid poison rose from the sea,[7]
The ascetics frightened ran to the cloud-hued
Seeking refuge from the treacherous fiends. (442)

He held up his palm, said, "Be not afraid;"
Drew to his ear his divine bow's string,
Made a sea of blood on the land,
And raised a hill with the Rakshasas' heads. (443)

The goodly missiles Rama aimed
At terrible Tataka's pair of sons
Plunged one of them into the sea
And despatched the other to Death's abode! (444)

---

7. Siva at the churning of the ocean for ambrosia.

As the arrows shot by the flower-decked hero
Covered in a moment the entire sky,
Those who survived ran helter-skelter
Lest walking on those corpses the hero should
  get them. (445)

The thundering arrows hit those fleeing,
Their headless corpses danced a jig;
Demons sated sang his praise,
Carrion birds made a roof overhead. (446)

A rain of flowers pierced that roof,
Drum-beats in heaven roared like the sea;
Indra and the other gods
Bowed down and blessed the handsome bowman. (447)

The pious ascetics showered their blessings,
The trees of the forest showered flowers,
And the sage ending his yaga in order
Said sweetly to sweet Rama. (448)

"That this yaga was guarded by you --
To me a matter of great good fortune --
Is nothing to you who made all this world,
And guarded it all in that gem, your stomach!"[8] (449)

That sage whose virtues were high as the hills
Said this and stayed with the other sages
For a day in that grove so full of flowers.
"What is your pleasure today," asked Rama
  next morning. (450)

"There is nothing I want that is too
  much for you,"
Said the sage, "great things are lying ahead.
Let us go and see in his fertile land
The yaga which Mithila's King has proclaimed. (451)

---

8. As the primordial Vishnu before his incarnation as Rama.

9. AHALYA

They reached the river Sone, a lovely damsel
Her sand-dune breasts decked with
  well-washed gems,
Sandal and *akhil* brought down from the hills,
Her waist the tender winding *vanji* creeper,
Fresh flowers humming with bees her tinkling
  waistlet,
Black sand her tresses, hill-encircling channels
Her anklets jingling with bells. (452)

When they reached that river, the sun
That he might be cool the next morning
Plunged his burning self in the sea
With his horses and chariot
Which outran the eyes of Aruna.[1] (453)

They reached a sweet-smelling grove
Where bees with their wives had sought refuge
Shut out from their cool almshouses
By the lotuses which closed their petals. (454)

---

1. The sun's charioteer.

Dispelling the dark which resembled Death's hue
The sun rose out of the blue sea
Like Brahma on the full-blown lotus
Springing from Vishnu's jewelled navel. (455)

The three resembling the triune gods
Rose up and saw the great Ganga
So like that river carrying gold[2]
With the *konrai* from the Bull-rider's[3] locks. (456)

By and by they reached Videha
Where storks half-swake in the lotus ponds
Mistake for *kayal*[4] the reflections
In the water of the lovely eyes
Bright and beguiling of the farm girls,
Stick them with their beaks and draw
back abashed! (457)

Peacocks danced in the groves of that land
To the drums of sluices from its tanks,
The lights lit by the asoka flowers
And the sweet music of the bees
Played on the strings of dripping honey! (458)

The blue lilies weeded out of its fields
And thrown on the red lotuses around
Were like the eyes of enticing women
Drawing the gaze of the farmers at work
To the disgust of their wives come
to fetch them! (459)

Maidens bathing in its pools
Spread confusion mid its swans

---

2. The Cauvery carrying the Yellow Komai flower.

3. Siva.

4. The Carp fish.

Which mistook them for themselves
  So lovely was their gait.
Their saffron leaving an imprint fast
On some of these birds and not others,
The unstained ones were more confused
  And acted coy --
When night came, the lotuses slept
  But not the birds!
(460)

Milk streaming from buffaloes' udders,
Juice from the riverbank mango trees
Or from sugarcanes crushed in the mills,
And fragrant honey from the combs
Gave little chance for other rivers! (461)

The fish in its rivers were so many
That they would leap and take refuge
In the flower-sheaths of the palms
  Planted on their banks
When the big buffalo calves
Disturbed the waters, being frightened
By the noise the drummers made
  Beating on their drums
To which danced girls liquid-eyed
Their waists thinner than cotton threads
Bent under the burden which they bore
  Of breasts which jutted like hills. (462)

Soft-limbed women plunged into its tanks
  Their sword-eyes sheathed in their lids;
And, their white bangles jingling like birds,
Rose from the waters like Lakshmi that day
  When the milky ocean was churned --
And the bees plunged into flowers. (463)

Walking thus pleasantly in this land
They reached Mithila's beflagged fortress
And saw in its outskirts an upright stone,
A sage's wife brought low through betrayal. (464)

When the dust from Rama's feet fell
on that stone
She stood again in her former shape, as one
Reaching the feet of God delusion-free,
Attains his real self -- and the sage said. (465)

"Prince, whose forbear brought Ganga from
the sky,
That joyous lightning which stands shy aside,
Is Ahalya the wife of the great sage
Who gave the sinner Indra a thousand eyes." (466)

Hearing this from the sage with
the ruddy locks,
"Alas! alas! what sort of world is this,"
Exclaimed the Prince, "Was it fate or accident
Which caused such havoc to one so venerable?" (467)

Replied to Rama the sagacious soul:
"Listen, Fortune's Child, in days gone by
The God of Thunder once, the sage away,
Saw his deer-eyed wife and was enthralled. (468)

"Pierced by that lance her eyes, and Madan's
shafts,
He sought a sure remedy in her arms.
His senses lost, he tricked the sage away,
And in his guileless guise entered his hut. (469)

"And she by his ingress inebriate
Felt a new love, and knew him who he was,
And yet would not desist -- so low she sank
While her high husband, a second Siva, (470)
hied home.

"An arrow could be stopped, but not his curse
Or blessing. She knew it and trembling
stood --
A figure now of everlasting shame --
While the rattled god in a cat's guise
tried to flee! (471)

"Fire darting from his eyes at what had
passed,
His words blazed forth like one of your
own shafts:
'A thousand pudenda shall cover you', he said,
And Indra on the instant was so covered! [5] (472)

"Covered with boundless shame, a laughing-stock
To all the world, guilt-laden Indra left;
And turning to his soft-limbed wife,
the sage --
'A harlot, thou shalt harden into stone!' (473)

"'The great," she said, 'as ordained must
forgive.
O fiery sage, vouchsafe an end to my curse!'.
'When the dust from the foot of flower-decked
Rama falls
On thee, thou shalt emerge from out that stone! (474)

"Thus wise the past, and now for
all the world
Not sorrow's but salvation's path you have
blazed;
That fight between dark demon and raincloud
Showed your arm's prowess there, here seen
your foot's." (475)

Absorbing all that the sage narrated
Rama, gives of this help, said,
"Seek, Mother, that great sage's mercy.
Don't grieve," and bowed to her golden feet. (476)

When that great sage astonished saw
These visitors to his hermitage,

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5. These were later turned to eyes on the pleadings of the other gods. The verse in "Kamban" stating this considered a spurious addition will be found in the Appendix (no. 557).

He welcomed them kindly and did
all the honours
Whereupon Gadi's son[6] told him -- (477)

"The dust of his feet had but to touch her
And your slim-waisted wife regained
her form;
In her heart she is guiltless, take her back,"
And that Brahma-like sage took in
those words. (478)

That Prince as virtuous as he was great
Bowed to Gotama, went round him
And gave that lady now without spot
Into his hand; and leaving that grove
With that other sage, saw a fort gem-decked. (479)

---

6. Viswamitra.

10. MITHILA APPROACHED

That fortressed city with its jewelled
  flags
Seemed to welcome with open arms
The Prince with the lotus eyes
And ask him to hurry up
To meet the goddess who had left
The spotless flower whereon she sat
To make that city her residence --
A big boon it got by penance. (480)

They saw the flags on the terraces
Dancing like the nymphs in heaven
At the thought of the youngman
Come to wed their Princess
On a message sent by Virtue's self
Who could find none else a fitting match
For her great and boundless beauty. (481)

When the sun set and the sky was turned
Into a milky ocean
They saw the banners standing close
On Mithila's towering mansions,
Getting wet when the clouds approached

And gave them a loving stroke,
And getting dried again by the smoke
Which rose from burning *akhil* wood.[1] (482)

They entered that golden city
Shining like Lakshmi's lotus
Because it contained Sita
Whom Madan himself couldn't draw
Although he had dipped his pencil
In ambrosia
And could only wonder
How to tackle his task. (483)

They walked through its long streets
Where they found scattered
Golden ornaments
Thrown away by men and women
Glittering like the sea-bed
When Agastya[2] drained its waters,
Or the sky at night
Thick set with numerous stars. (484)

The roads they went upon
Were never for a while the same --
First black with the waterfall
Of must from mountainous elephants;
Then white with the foam which ran
Like a river out of horses' mouths;
Then miry with rolling chariots,
And dusty when they got dried. (485)

They went through broad and
  beautiful streets
Littered with garlands with honey and bees

---

1. With which women scented their hair.

2. A great sage, the Father of Tamil, who once drank up the sea.

Lying like sweet-tongued women
Exhausted after a sexual combat
Wherein both equally matched
And unhindered in their love
A man and a woman engage. (486)

They saw dance halls wherein
To the tune of lute-strings honey-sweet
Vocal music and beat of drums
Girls danced with wisp-waists hard to guess!
The eyes of the dancers went after their hands
And their minds went after their eyes! (487)

They saw girls on swings which hung
From emerald palms with coral fruits,
Men's thoughts swinging back and forth
With them like mortals' births and deaths,
While the bees which arose from the girls'
  garlands
Screamed out of sympathy for their waists! (488)

They saw numerous shops heaped up
With gems and gold, pearls, yak tails,
Akhil peacock plumes and ivory
Brought together by the traders
As husbandmen shore up river banks
With the silt brought down by the Cauvery. (489)

They saw elephants fighting in sport,
Eyes reddened with rage, hard tusks entwined,
Two mountains clashing inseparable
Like lovers, their passion churned up by Madan,
Engaged in a combat of intense love. (490)

They went drinking through their ears
The clear music which was served
Sweet as honey by that city's girls,
Their minds and hands going together
With a flashing smile, but fingers red
With the strain of tightening the lute's screw. (491)

They saw harnessed horses circling
Scarce perceived as they flashed by,
Like vessels on a potter's wheel,
Unremitting like good men's friendship,
Undistracted like a yogi's thought. (492)

They saw a moon at every window
Of the jewelled terraces
Rid at last of his dark spot,
Equipped with lances and Madan's bow,
Curly hair blue-black like bees
And a red streak like the *kidai* bush. (493)

They saw red lotuses not a few
Expressing their intense joy
And unable to hide their urge
  However hard they tried
As those who drink the toddy fresh
Out of vessels crystal bright
Laugh aloud and can't keep back
  Their frenzied words. (494)

They saw girls playing with balls
Black as their eyes fell on them
But red when reaching their hands
  Fickle, inconstant
Like crystal, and wanton women
  Lustful and also selling
Their cobra middles for money
Taking the colour of those
  They take in! (495)

They saw many spots where girls
  with spear-long eyes
Danced till their fragrant chaplets
  were unloosed,
And the crystal thing they held in their
  hands turned red,
For bracelets, earrings, necklaces,
  other gauds,

Costly shawls of fine Kalinga thread,
And *vinas* shaped like the shark
  Offered as prize. (496)

They saw many tanks wherein
Girls took joy in bathing,
Embracing their own images
As nothing else could match them:
Lotuses, lilies blue and white,
Leaves of tendrils outspread,
Nenuphars, the *kitai*[3] bush,
Waves, carps, the pregnant *varaal*[4] --
All of them distressed
As none was up to their mark. (497)

They saw many spots where lucky lads
Played with spherical unripe fruits,
Their shoulders bearing the sandal-paste
And imprints left by their
  sweethearts' breasts,
Chasing those spheres as we
Drawn by our senses go hither and thither
Bewildered and lost! (498)

They saw crowds of youngmen
Dazzling like the sun
Generous in their gifts
Madans spared by Siva's eye --
Their hands red with their bows,
Their hair with their sweethearts' feet
Which they had placed on their heads
To placate their feigned dislike! (499)

They saw groves full of women
Like peacocks and flowery stalks
Trading their treacle-sweet words

---

3. A porous red shrub.

4. A kind of fish.

Trading their tresacle-sweet words
  with parrots
And putting heavenly nymphs to shame
As they plucked flowers
While bees applauded
Their outswanning the swans in their gaits. (500)

They saw a ditch around the golden fortress
Filled with the bubbling stream
  of Ganga's water
And imaging the warrior-king's palace
As if reflecting the heavenly mansions above. (501)

The sheen of gold, the scent of flowers,
  the taste
Of sweet honey, melodious sound of verse --
All these at once assailed them, made them halt
Before the Maidens' Mansion where swans played. (502)

All those from Brahma down, when they compare
Take for their pattern Lakshmi, Queen of Heaven
Since that same queen has taken Sita's form,
To whom or what shall we compare *her* now? (503)

Maidens fair as Uma worshipped her,
And baffled by her beauty's boundless stretch
Wished like gods they had unwinking eyes,
While the gods lamented that *they* had but two! (504)

Her eyes outran the gazelles in their grace,
Outshone in killing brightness spear and sword,
She seemed, alighted on the mansion's top
A rarer nectar than from the sea emerged. (505)

"Give us a damsel like her, honey-sweet,"
The gods might ask, but Brahma can't oblige;
Even the ocean much besought can yield
Only its best -- the nectar given before. (506)

The bright-eyed Menaka and all the nymphs
Loved and sought after by the gods above
Seeing her beauty became sick at heart,
Their moonlight killed by her perpetual day! (507)

She left her lotus-throne to dwell with us.
For this whom shall we thank? The sages stern,
On ceaseless fasts and vigils, Virtue's self,
The Earth, the Sky or all the gods arrayed? (508)

"My Lady, Gazelle, Honey, Lotus-Hand,
Ambrosia," her peerless maids called her,
And strewed flowers for her to walk upon,
On whose golden pollen she stepped light! (509)

Her maids were slender tendrils weighted down
With golden anklets, waistbands, garlands,
  chains,
A million lightnings gazing at her, and she
The Queen of Lightning standing in their midst. (510)

More killing than a spear or Death himself,
Who can describe her eyes? Her maiden grace,
Soft and appealing melted even stones,
High hill, low wall, hard rock and
  shrinking grass. (511)

To love-lorn eyes her maids provide
A feast, while they with every look
Feed on her as on nectar sweet.
If thus to women, what to our chief? (512)

Necklace and earrings long familiar
With dove-eyed damsels whom they decked
Gained a beauty by this maid's birth
Which *she* gave *them*, not they to her! (513)

Fair beyond thought she stood: their eyes
Met and gorged each other; their souls
No longer theirs became as one --
The hero gazed, and so did she! (514)

Her look, a pair of sharp spears,
Into his puissant shoulders drove,
While his, the hero's large, red eyes
Rested on the charmer's breasts. (515)

Bound by that devouring look,
The bowman-hero and sword-eyed she
Seemed to merge in one another,
Their sanctuary each other's heart. (516)

The waistless maiden and spotless man,
Two bodies now had one sole soul!
On the sea commingled, and then apart[5]
When old friends meet what need of words? (517)

Her eyes long-drawn, gaze endless
  and unwinking,
To a picture was the golden girl reduced.
Behind the sage went Rama, him behind
Her thoughts, her will, and all her body's
  weal! (518)

When the Prince had gone
  Beyond the reach of her eyes,
Her mind, a musty tusker
  Shook its goad away --
What may one expect
  Of her maidhood then?

The love which had entered her eyes
  Took possession of the heart
Of one who had a waist
  Which was as thin as a thread,
And spread throughout her body
  Like runnet curdling milk. (520)

---

5. Referring to Sita and Rama, in origin Lakshmi and Vishnu on their bed in the milky ocean.

She pined and would not tell,
  Distressed in mind and mute
And Kama shooting his arrow
  Added fuel to the fire. (521)

Her long eyes reaching her earrings --
  Spears needing no oil or hone --
Her tresses and clothes all loosened
  She was a green tendril
Wilting in a flame. (522)

Her jingling waistbands and bracelets
  of conches,
The firmness of her mind, her complexion,
All loosened and lost, she looked like the sea
When churned by the gods and deprived
  of its treasures. (523)

Her jewels loosened, shame gone,
Beauty lost and breast wounded
By love's shafts, she was a striken deer,
A jewelled peacock hard to lead. (524)

They took her with her long *kayal* eyes
  Reaching her jewelled ears
To a bed bespread with leaves and sprouts
  As soft as her feet and hands
And flower-petals that had been cooled
  With waterdrops cold as ice. (525)

She reached that couch and lay on it
  Drying its fresh-plucked flowers
Like a snow-storm hitting a lotus pond;
  And its coolth was swallowed up
Like the full moon in the sky
  By the sword-fanged serpent.[6] (526)

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6. Referring to a lunar eclipse supposed to be caused by Rahu, the serpent.

Her lance-like eyes sheathed in her forehead
Shed pearl-like tears which dropped
on her breasts
Like drops from clouds on mountain crests;
And her hot sighs as if from a forge
Turned them at once into vapour. (527)

Like a peacock shot down without mercy
By a cruel hunter in a forest
She lay wilting on her bed
A soft sprout singed by her burning heart. (528)

The copious flowers grew sharp and stung;
The sandal-paste dried up and flew;
The threads which held her gems together
Were burnt, and the leaves on her bed
were scorched. (529)

Servant-maids, foster mothers and sisters
Distressed and bewildered
Could not solve the mystery
And waved before her, to counter evil,
The plate of water and red rice.[7] (530)

Her jewels and garlands scorched and burnt
By the fire set ablaze by waving fans,
The Princess looked like a statue of gold
Melting in a fierce flame. (531)

"His head a dark forest crowned
with a garland,"
"A pillar of iron," "A mountain of jade,"
"His eyes red lotuses," she prattled,
"Himself a rain cloud complete with a bow!" (532)

"Barging into me, melting and destroying
My steadfast mind and womanhood,

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7. The traditional ritual <u>arati</u> to avert evil.

He cannot be the God of Love
As the lucky bow on his rock-like shoulders
Is not a thing of sugarcane.[8] (533)

"The womanly virtues shame and discertion
I was born with I find nowhere;
He who aching walked away
Must through my eyes have burgled me! (534)

"Neither His hair like sapphire dark,
Nor his face like the moon, nor his long hands,
Nor his shoulders like a lovely mountain —
Not these, but his smile first swallowed me! (535)

"Not his broad, bright, vampire chest,
Nor his foot like a lotus in a tank,
But his gait like a musty elephant's it was
Which has left its imprint on my heart. (536)

"Come to think of it, he can't be a god
As his lotus eyes are not unwinking;
The banded bow in his strong hand
And the sacred thread across his chest
Proclaim him as a King's son. (537)

"Shall these my eyes see that Prince again —
Him who breached my steadfast mind
My twin, the guard of my modesty —
And get to know him ere I die?" (538)

While thus she spoke and more like this —
"Lo, here he is!" "Oh, he has gone!"
Her amorous mind aflame was melted
Not by one but many thoughts. (539)

The sun hot from the day he was made
Unble to bear the extra heat

---

8. s is that of Kama, the God of Love.

Of her whose gait was like a swan's
With trembling hands plunged into the sea. (540)

And evening came, black-hued, red-haired
The glow of the sunset mixed with the dark.
A very Death with his noose the South Wind,
To that rare being to inflame her. (541)

It could well be called the Vampire-demon
Dancing to the drum of the bird-screams above
And the anklebells of the sea's waves,
Its dress combining black and red —
The darkness of night with the evening's glow! (542)

When the South Wind entered through the wound
  Caused in her by Madan's shaft,
Having bathed in tanks of fire
  And powdered itself with pollen venom,
She who had lost her sense and shame,
  Tired and wilting under it,
Looked at the sky leagued with the evening
  And asked, "Is this the shape of Death?" (543)

The darkness of the evening came before her
  In the thick hue of demons,
Exhausting her and making her wonder
  What woman-killer this was.
"The sea or a raincloud? a sapphire mountain?
  The fragrant flower of the *kaya?*
Or the *kuvalai* flower or nenuphar,
  Or the dark waterplant *naithal?* 544)

"O nightsky, dark as a serpent,
  With the stars for your venomous teeth,
A red sac full of poison
  And the South for your blasting breath —
Why do you dart your tongue at me
  While one unceasing shoots?
I have but this one life
  And desperately would save it —

How am I your enemy
  That you should take on this sin? (545)

"Has the ancient poison spread all over
  Or the dark sea surged up and spread?
Has his blue hue dwelt on by all
  Bubbling up filled the world?
Has someone mixed the colour of Death
  With the unguent of black magic
And plastered heaven and earth with it
  To cause this distressing dark? (546)

The one who was here has gone,
  None was found to prevent him;
Not pitying me, a poor woman,
  O *anril*,[9] have you learnt treachery
From Manmatha shooting in the dark?
  Or is it my past sins
That have taken shape here and now
  And appear in your form? (547)

When thus she thought and lay sorrowing there
  In that palace which touched the skies,
Her maids removed from the moonstone dais
  The tall lanterns fed with ghee
Lest they should heat and hurt her,
  And put jewelled lamps instead
Which needed neither wick nor oil
  To convert night into day. (548)

The moon rose white out of the sea
Like the golden bowl out of the milky ocean
  Containing ambrosia,
When the gods eager to get it
Churned that ocean with the mountain
  The great God fixed there
And drops of milk and dazzling gems

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9. A bird so devoted to its mate that separation from it will kill it.

Scattered by the serpent-rope
Rose sky-high and outnumbered
  The stars above. (549)

As once upon a banyan leaf
  God gorged as if hungry the seas and earths
And out of that ocean, his navel
  Rose the red lotus
To which Brahma the bee hummed
  Chanting the four Vedas,
The earthly sea too, with *its* waves,
Produced a white lotus –
  The circle of the moon! (550)

Set with stars as if with spots
  Marks to identify
The midnight sky was all lapped up
  By the moon's tongue wide-spread.
Like a palm sheath in a silver jug
  The moonbeams were stacked in the east –
"What will be the effect of it all
  On that sweet-tongued parrot, our Princess?" (551)

The darkness which seized all the world
  With its hands, the evening's colours,
Was being swallowed by the moon
  With its stacked beams rising cool;
Spreading over earth and heaven
  And each quarter, it resembled
The fame of Vennainallur Sadayan[10]
  With his large and fertile fields. (552)

The moon which arose out of the waves –
  A tall mason -- spread his hands
And proceeded to whitewash
  With the lime, his dazzling beams
The globe which came out of Vishnu's navel

10. Kamban's patron.

Now old, dirty and soiled
With a view to refurbishing it
And making it new! (553)

The sweet-smelling lotus, with Lakshmi its guest,
Folded up, throwing the noisy bees out;
And the red *ambal* now came into its own
Like petty princelings when
world-rulers retire. (554)

"O white fire born
Out of the whelming fiery black,
Why are you so cruel
To me and the rolling sea
Which, outshone in hue
By that perpetual wizard,[11]
Sulks and turns its back
And murmurs ceaselessly! (555)

"O Moon, who rose from the sea,
You are not cruel by nature;
You have not killed anyone;
You arose with sweet ambrosia
And Lakshmi the soft-footed
Like a female elephant –
Why must you burn me?" (556)

White moon beams out of the sky
Whipping her soft breasts
She rolled on the lotuses
Like a swan mid coals of fire. (557)

Assailed by those moonbeams
Immovable and spread out,
She wilted, withered, drooped –
And all that the red lotuses
Spread for her bed endured,
She too flower-like suffered. (558)

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11. Rama.

The sandal-paste laid thick and thicker
Only seethed and scalded her;
They fanned and fanned
But her soft breast burned;
For the love-sick
What remedy? (559)

Her maidens showing more than a mother's love
With flowers, with pollen,
  and with tender sprouts
Tried to cool her as she felt hotter and
  hotter --
They must have changed her bed
  twothousand times! (560)

Thus in that Maidens' Mansion
Lay she the female swan
On her bed of flowers distressed.
Let us now turn and tell
What happened to that hero
Who had glimpsed a lightning there. (561)

Those three went and saw the King
Who, delighted, welcomed them
And lodged them in a tall mansion
In that golden town like Indra's. (562)

To them hied a great sage,
Hard penance personified
The son of the one restored to her shape
By the spotless hero's lotus foot. (563)

Rama advanced and honoured him
To his heart's exceeding joy,
And that virtuous man blessed him
And turned to Kausika. (564)

The great sage, son of Gautama,
Scanned the ascetic's face
And said, "What penance has this city done
To merit your presence here?" (565)

Kausika, steeped in the sastras,
Looked at Sadanand so friendly
Who for his purity could be compared
To Brahma himself, and said. (566)

"Listen, sage refined by *tapas*,
This is he who brought to an end
Tataka's life, my yaga, and the curse
Your mother endured, and so ended
The sorrow in my heart as well." (567)

When Kausika said this, the sage
Whose wealth lay in his endless penance
Replied, "Great sage, your grace assured
What rarities can't these heroes achieve?" (568)

He looked at the moon-like face of him
Whose hue resembled the *kayal* flower,
Sapphire, the dark and miry sea,
The raincloud and the nenuphar. (569)

"Garlanded hero, let me tell you
How for many years this sage
Was a ruler and held just sway
Over those whom he protected. (570)

"Ruling according to the codes
He went to hunt one day in the woods
Where Vasishtha the great sage
Much praised by all had his dwelling. (571)

Arundhati's husband showed due honour,
Asked him to stay, and when the King did,
Said he would feast him, and asked Surabhi[12]
To produce ambrosial food, which she did. (572)

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12. His cow.

'Feed, King', he said, 'with your army
On these viands six-flavoured.'
And after the food they were given
Sweet-smelling garlands and sandal-paste —
And the King relaxed said musingly: (573)

'Great sage, you did not so much as stir
And this cow has served my entire host
With ambrosial food. All men declare
Learned and virtuous that the best things
Belong by right to the King alone. (574)

'This excellent cow is not for you.
Give her to me.' To which the sage
Said nothing. Then a little afterwards,
'Mighty King, with your fierce lance,
I bark-clad have no rights here:
You may take her yourself if she comes.' (575)

'I will do as told,' said the King and arose.
Exulting he put a cord round that cow.
But she, as they started, freed herself
And said, 'Master who know all the Vedas,
Did you give me to that powerful King?'
To which that omniscient sage replied, (576)

'I didn't. It is the King who has seized you.'
The cow enraged said, 'You will see
How I destroy his noisy army,'
And at once shook her bristling hair. (577)

Then Gurjas, hunters, Chinese, Sonakas,
And hosts of mlecchas came out of the bristles
And destroyed the entire army
Enraging thereby his sons. (578)

'This is not the cow's might,' they said,
'But the sage's trickery.
We will cut off his head right now'
And advanced upon him. But when they did
He glared at them and they were all killed. (579)

"When he saw his hundred sons destroyed
The King shot up like a ghee-fed flame,
Sent a series of shafts off his bow well bent
And the sage ordered his stick to oppose them. (580)

"When all the missiles he had learnt including
  the divine
The more they were discharged, the more they
  were absorbed
He lauded Siva whose bow was Meru
Who granted a great weapon, and vanished. (581)

"The King shot that bolt, and the gods trembled
Afraid that he was destroying the world;
But the sage absorbed it and shone
  all the brighter,
That destructive weapon fizzling out. (582)

"The King saw that and realized
That it was a piece of folly to think
That great might and splendour belonged
To anyone except the learned sages.
Even the might of one who rules
Over all the world is not real might.
And having learnt this he decided
To do rigorous penance in Indra's quarter.[13] (583)

"When Indra, King of the gods, saw
How brooding over Vasishtha's victory
The King of Kings had started his penance,
He was frightened and sent down
The fawn-eyed Tilottama
From among the heavenly nymphs. (584)

"The King saw her and was struck
By Manmatha's shaft and lost his sense.
Plunging into a sea of lust

---

13. The East.

He wasted many valuable days
And then realised what the learned
And mature men had written of old,
And hating everything like poison
Despised and jeered at himself. (585)

"Enraged that this was the doing
Of the King of Heaven
He cursed that maid to be born on earth,
And eyes red, heart within him black
Hied to the quarter of Yama the strong.[14] (586)

"When he was doing his penance in the South
Came Trisanku, King of Ayodhya,
Who had asked his guru Vasishtha
To help him reach heaven in his
  corporal body
And been told that this was impossible. (587)

"'If you can't help me, let me choose
For this yaga', said the King,
'Some other from this wide world.'
Whereon, said Vasishtha, enraged and fierce,
'Since you would abandon your old guru
And seek another, you shall lose caste.' (588)

"Because of the curse of Brahma's son
The King of Kings lost his form which had put
The sun to shame, and his face which shone
Like the morning lotus, lost its bloom.
His form turned such that all earthlings
  despised it. (589)

"His necklaces, crown and other gauds
Turned black as iron, his thread and skin
Looking like leather, his entire body
Dirty and black, he came to the city (590)

---

14. The South.

Only to be treated with scorn.
Much perturbed, he sought the forest.

"After a few days spent there
He went one day to Kausika's grove
Who asked , 'Who are you outcaste,
why have you come?'
He bowed and narrated all that had happened. (591)

"'Is that all?' laughed the sage; 'I shall
perform
This sacrifice and send you to heaven.
He called the sages and those near came.
But Vasishtha's sons said, 'We never heard
Of a king conducting yaga for an outcaste!" (592)

"Hearing which the sage in his wrath
Said, 'You shall become low-caste hunters,'
And at once they wandered in the woods
as hunters –
And he, ending the yaga, invited the gods. (593)

"'A king builds a fire for an outcaste
And asks us to hasten – how excellent!'
Jeered the gods. And that king of elephants
Told to go heavenwards on the strength of
the yaga
Conducted by the sage all by himself
Went up to the sky in a chariot. (594)

"When he went up, the gods enraged
At an outcaste bade him descend
And falling supportless head formost
He cried, 'Sage, save me!', and the sage
Laughed like thunder and said aloud 'Stay'. (595)

"
'I shall create all who despised me,
From the highest down, sun, moon, and stars
Who shall travel, their lights never dimmed,
From South to North -- both moving
and unmoving' (596)

"Indra and the four-faced Brahma,
The dark-throated,[15] other gods in a crowd
Said, 'Forbear, O sage! You have done well.
To save one who sought refuge in you.
He shall stay where he is with his gallaxy.' (597)

"After the gods had gone away saying,
'You are now a Rajarishi,
And five stars shall shift to the south
To proclaim your greatness,'
That great sage hurried to the west
Where the King of Oceans holds his sway,
And started severe penances there. (598)

'King Ambarisha, with bows, swords and army
Sweet-spoken, life of all earthly lives,
Set on a human sacrifice
Tireless sought a lad for this,
And went in his chariot to the forest
Laden with a great deal of gold. (599)

"When the King went to the flowery grove
Where Richika dwelt and asked
The mother said that the youngest
Was hers and couldn't be spared;
And the father the same of the eldest;
And the son who remained
Laughed and told the King as follows: (600)

"'Give the father who begat me
As much as he wants to relieve him;'
And bowing ascended the chariot.
And as he went without delay
The sun reached the zenith. (601)

"The King got down for the midday ritual,
And the virtuous lad did likewise.

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15. Siva.

Seeing the sage there who had conquered evil
He fell in distress at his lotus feet. (602)

"Looking sweetly at that terror-striken lad
The great sage asked, 'Why are you perturbed?'
'You who know the essence of virtue,'
Said the lad, 'My parents have sold me
To the King for a large sum of money.' (603)

"Hearing what his sister and brother-in-law
had done,
'You shall not suffer. I will save your life.'
Said that worthy sage, and asked one of
his sons
To go with the King — which none of
them would. (604)

"His eyes reddened shaming the sun
His heart sick, his bristles getting hot
Like the volcano under the sea,
'You heartless creatures,' said he, 'may you
Wander in the woods like savages
And hunt for your food in deep despair.' (605)

"The four sons not killed by Vasishtha's wrath
Cursed to become Savaras,[16]
'Don't be distressed,' he told the lad,
'Learn these two mantras at one.'
And teaching them to his nephew added, (606)

"'Garlanded youth, when you go with the King
And are tied to the stake, recite these
And the gods with Brahma and Rudra
Will come to the yaga, and it will end
Without any harm to your life.'
And the youngman praised him and left. (607)

---

16. A hill tribe.

"He recited those mantras mentally as told
And the gods riding Garuda, swan and bull[17]
Surrounded by others reached the yaga
And saved both the yaga and
the youngman's life.
And the sage departed to the north. (608)

"Reaching the North, nose clutched
with his hand,
Breath regulated, intent on the one
letter[18]
He held on for many years until the smoke rose
Piercing his skull, and made
all the worlds quiver. (609)

"Like the day on which the burner of the cities
Flayed the elephant and wore its skin,[19]
As if the world was covered with darkness
By clouds which arose and spread all over, (610)

"That great smoke reached all the worlds
And put out the gathered rays of the sun;
And the eyes were blinded of our
guardians in heaven
As well as of the underworld elephants.'[20] (611)

"The smoke occupying all the sky
Where the clouds should have been,
Earth's moving and unmoving were frightened —
The sun's rays shot back
And the gods in heaven were all trembling
In great fear. (612)

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17. Vishnu, Brahma and Siva.

18. Om, the sacred syllable.

19. Siva burning Tripura.

20. It is believed that eight elephants each for one direction under our earth, support it.

"Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and Indra
And all the other gods
Came one by one to meet the great sage
Whose penance was his wealth. (613)

"Siva, Vishnu and Brahma said,
'Great Sage, whose wealth is your penance,
There is no one other than you
Who has crossed the sea of Vedic lore.' (614)

"That sage heard those words,
Bowed his head, clasped his hands,
And swelled with pleasure at his good fate;
And the gods returned to their places. (615)

"This is what happened long ago.
There is none so great as he in penance –
For you who have secured his grace
What can be difficult?" he said. (616)

When Gautama's dear son said this,
Those heroes victorious rose with joy,
Fell at his feet and honoured him,
And he, blessing them, retired. (617)

The sage and his brother gone
To the places assigned for their sweet rest,
Rama was like a dark fruit left
With the night, the moon and the thoughts
of that maid. (618)

"Can lightning coming out of a cloud
Take, I wonder, the shape of a woman?
I don't know how else to explain
What I see in my mind and with my two eyes. (619)

"Could this be Lakshmi the Lotus Maid
Entering the lotus in my heart,
The precious apple of the eye
Surrounded by its milky white

Like Vishnu the dark diamond
Resting mid the milky ocean? (620)

"Though heartlessly she has devoured me
With her terrible, venomous eyes,
Because of my love for her
I see all things in this dim world
Moving and still in her golden image. (621)

"Though my worthless chest cannot embrace
Those jugs of gold, her breasts adorned,
Shall I not see that moon again,
That dazzling smile, those fruity lips? (622)

"A jewelled middle, two long sword-eyes,
And a pair of arrogant breasts,
A smile held back tight in the mouth —
Does Death need so many missiles? (623)

"If a sugar-cane bow and shafts of flowers
Can so easily vanquish me,
Where indeed, I should like to know,
Is that thing called strength to be found? (624)

"The moonlight spreading far and wide
As if the milky ocean arose
Boiling over in a flood
To take possession of the world
Seems determined to pierce my life
Through and through my inmost being —
Can poison appear in white? (625)

"Since my mind can never tread
  A path that is not right
There is no need of further proof
That the jewelled maid so sweet of tongue
  Is a girl unwed." (626)

As if the white umbrella
  Of night's king collapsed

And the jewel of his Western Queen
  Dropped from her forehead
The moon, his reign ended,
  Plunged into the sea. (627)

When their Lord, the Moon, departed thus
The Quarters, his ladies of pleasure,
Sorrowing washed away the paste
Of white sandal they had worn. (628)

As the great Prince love-sick wilted thus
The sun arose over the Eastern Mount
Which was huge and black like the elephant
Whose skin God Siva wore as his wrap.
It rose as though it was his forehead eye
To bring joy to the sorrowful maids —
The lotuses so long deprived
Of its beloved presence on which they doted. (629)

The dust of the hills raised by the hooves
Of the sun's green horses
Mixed with the water and honied flowers
  The pious offered
Served as vermilion for the young sun
  Who applied it
To the forehead of that elephant which ruled
  like a king,
  A mountain immovable! (630)

As chaste wives, their hearts overjoyed,
  their faces aglow
Welcome their husbands, dear as their lives,
  returning in time
After a war or wealth acquired for themselves,
Happy to hear their chariot bells, their
  langour gone,
So the lotuses in every pond opened their
  blossoms,
Their faces revealing the joy that they
  felt in their hearts. (631)

To the music of numerous Vedic chants
  Sung by the horse-faced,[21]
Hymned by the world, gods, sages and Brahmins
  Joining their hands,
To the sea's drum-beats, the sky
  for his theatre,
  The sun staged a dance,
His rays outspread like the red locks of Siva
  On the firmament. (632)

•The raincloud who had left behind
  His fell disc to take to a bow,[22]
His soft bed lit with a thousand gems
  To toss on a bed of grief,
When the young Sun on his one-wheel car
  Came and caressed his feet
Saw the end of a sleepless night
  And reached the shore of that sea. (633)

When that night as long as an aeon
  Came somehow to an end,
He rose, an elephant, to do the rites
  Traditional and prescribed;
Bowed to the Vedic sage and then
  With him and his beloved brother
Reached Janaka's yaga ground
  Hung with fragrant garlands. (634)

The yaga duly came to an end
  To the sound of thunderous drums,
Janaka moved like Indra
  To a neighbouring sky-high hall,
And seated on a high seat

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21. The Kinn... beings with human bodies but the faces of horses, noted for their skill in notes!

22. Rama who had given up the chakra, he wielded as Vishnu and took up the bow as his weapon.

Set with precious gems
The great sage, Rama with his bow
And his younger brother. (635)

His two eyes sucking up the Prince's beauty,
The King touched the sage's feet
And begged him to introduce them.
"These guests of yours," said the sage,
"Are sons of the mighty Dasaratha
Come to look at your yaga.
They will have a look too at your bow,"
He said and started to dilate. (636)

11. ANCESTRY SET FORTH

"Who doesn't know Manu, the first of
  the solar race?
The great Prithu whose bow compelled the Earth
To yield the milk which saved created beings
In all their diverse forms from dying of famine
Was of his race. (637)

"O King, with your big crown bejewelled
Ikshvaku worshipped Brahma for long years
To get from him that supreme snake-bedded
  Splendour
Which will choose Srirangam for its home[1]
So that all of us may see it there
And our sorrows and our sins will cease.
Who knows not him knows not anything. (638)

"Know that to that family belonged
One who rode Indra transformed to a bull
When that god unable to defeat the Titans

---

1. The image of Vishnu in Srirangam, a town between the rivers Cauvery and Coleroon.

Asked him if he would smite off their heads
And restore his kingdom to him, and that King
Promised his help at once and took up his bow. (639)

"Even I can't take his progeny's full measure
Whose towering fame outtopped all words
of praise.
When the roaring ocean was churned with
the tall mountain
It was one of them who came to the help
of the gods,
So that with nectar obtained,
Grey hair, shrunk skin, and old age could
all become
Things of the past
And Indra's self rescued from death. (640)

"Among the unnumbered ancestors
of these boys
Whose great qualities are beyond thought
Was one great monarch who ruled
the three worlds
With such a dazzling wheel of authority
That the tiger and the lamb drank together
Off the same pool. (641)

O Monarch, at whose feet fall kings in heaps,
Once when the gods and Titans were at war,
One of this race, like the God Virtue armed
Wearing his brilliant crown, necklace and sword
Saved Amaravati. (642)

"O King with the dazzling lance, who are we
To praise these heroes, their anklets
flashing fire,
For looking after and guarding their subjects
When one of this race exchanged his own life
For that of a gentle bird?[2] (643)

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2. Sibi. Vide verse 243.

"O King, with lance fleshed in your
  enemy's corse,
Men of this race moved by sympathy
Rolled hills as if they were cocoanut shells
And flattened the orb for the sea's water
  to flow[3]--
What further proof is needed of their might? (644)

"O King with burning lance tipped with your
  foe's flesh,
If even Sesha[4] cannot sing their praise
How can *I* find it easy to do so?
He who brought the holy Ganga down[5]
From the sky, so that even Siva's head
Crowned with the *konrai* could be bathed by it
Was, you should know, a king of this same race. (645)

"O King with an umbrella so like the moon
But without our moon's hare-like stain,
One of this race performed a full hundred
Hard sacrifices, so that the sea-girt globe
Became as it were a gooseberry on his palm
And so quite simply put Indra's self to trouble. (646)

"Chandra's rescuer, Siva's vanquisher,
The one who burnt with his arrow Titan Dundubi
All belonged to this race whence too came
Raghu who conquered Indra and captured
  the quarters. (647)

"As the dark Vishnu took unto himself
Lakshmi churned out of the ocean,
So Aja churned with his bow
The sea of his enemy kings —
And so obtaining Indumati,

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3. The Sagaras (vide Appendix stanza 513).

4. The serpent with twothousand tongues.

5. Bhagiratha (vide Appendix stanza 530).

A very gem with her pearly smile —
Proudly wore her on his shoulder,
As Vishnu Lakshmi on his chest. (648)

"O King whose main gate resounds for ever
  with music,
There is none who doesn't know Dasaratha,
  Aja's son
And not even Brahma can exhaust the praise
Of these his sons. But listen to what
  I know. (649)

"He who conquered his foes like the flaming sun
  the snow
  So that all could live at ease,
His bow his only aid, the guardian of
  the world,
  Virtue his armour,
A greater than Manu in knowing the law
  And observing it
Was frustrated nevertheless
  For lack of a son. (650)

"He sought to end his sorrows with the help
  Of the Staghead Sage
Who had been seduced by women of pleasure
  Bow-browed, red-mouthed,
With long black eyes, wisp waist,
  and a middle,
  Ready for sale,
Whom he mistook because of their breasts
  For strange-horned beasts. (651)

"He fell at the feet of that sage and begged
  That he might be blessed with sons
Who after him would rule the world —
  The lack of good deeds in his past
Being the cause of the infertile wombs
  Of his wives with their lovely breasts,
Even though he was monarch of all the world
  With its seas and its streams. (652)

"That sage heard those words and filled
With grace and joy,
Promised him Princes who would guard
Not this world alone
But all the worlds — for which
should be brought
The things needed
For a great yaga of which the gods
Would partake. (653)

"The things needed quickly arranged
For that son-yielding yaga,
The great man of penance brought it
To a happy end.
From the fire then arose
A royal demon
Carrying in a jewelled bowl
White rice sweet as nectar. (654)

"As directed by the sage
Learned in the Vedas,
The King whose like was himself alone
Divided that sweet food
Which rose in that golden bowl
Into four parts
And gave them in the right way
To his three bright wives. (655)

"Because of the wide-spread sins
Cause by Sin
And Virtue's virtuous deeds laid down
By the endless Vedas,
The red-lipped Kausalya bore
And took on her jewelled hands
Rama dark, sea-hued, whose beauty
No painter can paint. (656)

"The daughter of Kekaya brought forth
Bharatha, an ocean
Into which fell the compelling streams

Of righteousness
Who in his virtues and his beauty
Is akin
To the great and generous Prince
Seated here. (657)

"The younger to these two brought forth
To the terror of the lawless demons
Two strong sons of victory
Who, if mountains can be seen
Standing bow in hand, resembled
Meru golden-red in colour
And Kailasa the silver range. (658)

"The four sons like the four Vedas
Could grasp the essence of things
Excelling the Goddess of Learning herself.
Their skill in archery was such
That missiles seemed to wait on them
Like enemies vanquished in war.
Like the loud sea tides
Under a full moon
Their knowledge grew
By leaps and bounds. (659)

"O King with your spear resting in its sheath,
The patient Dasaratha to whose feet
The vanquished kings brought their tributes
Was their father only in name.
The one who initiated them
Made them quickly learn the Vedas
And brought them up, you should understand,
Was Vasishtha. (660)

"In order to kill those cruel fiends
Bent on hindering my yaga
I went and fetched the flower-soled Princes;
But even as we entered the forest
The terrible Tataka herself turned up. (661)

"Have a look, Sir, at those strong hands
Which look as though they are
the billowy sea's.
A shaft from them pierced the chest
Of Tataka whose eyes belched fire
As if from a forge — and it went
Through her, through a mountain, through
a tree, through the earth. (662)

"There was no end to the heap of heads
With ruddy hair that were mowed down.
One arrow sent one of her sons to the sky.
And the other son went I don't know where —
But my yaga was completed. (663)

"Study carefully, Sir, and learn
The prowess of this hero
Which even Brahma may not fully know.
I taught him the use of missiles
Which can burn down all the worlds
With their seas and mountains.
This through my penance was my privilege.
And these weapons wait upon him
To my envy and shame. (664)

"You should know that it was the dust
From his jewelled foot, a lotus unfading,
Which restored to her former shape
Gautama's wife. This dark one
I love better than my own life —
And this is the story of him and his arm." (665)

12. THE BOW

"What," said the King, "shall I say to this?
My heart is aquiver quelled by this bow;
If this youth can string it indeed
I shall have crossed the sea of my sorrow
And my girl be truly blessed." (666)

He said, and ordered those in front
To bring out that mountainous bow;
And four obeying ran to the hall
Where in bands of gold it stood. (667)

Sixteen thousand men of might
Strong as tuskers, with rocklike shoulders,
Overspread with thick hair
Carried it on poles inserted
Into supports all along. (668)

To the relief of earth's broad back
And the shame of tall Meru
The bow changed place, and people came
From the town spread out like the sea,
Crowding and shouting to see it
And occupying each inch of the land. (669)

"Where is he who can string this bow?"
Said some who were there, "if it be not
He who bears the discus and conch?[1]
If he comes, the girl can wed." (670)

"To call it a bow" said some others,
"Is to cheat. It is a mountain of gold."
"Brahma didn't make it with his hands,
"But the power of his penance." (671)

"Is it Meru the strong, heaped up?" said some;
"Is it the ocean-churner?" asked others;
"Is it Ananta the king of the serpents?
Or Indra's bow fallen from the sky?" (672)

"Why did he order this to be brought?"
"Or there other kings mad as he?"
"Who knows, good fate may yet prevail."
"Has the bride ever looked at this?" (673)

"Where is the target for this bow?"
"But it is only to honour the girl."
"Will the Vishnu there string it for sure?"
"Alas for our wretched fate!" (674)

While the crowd buzzed around like this,
The bow pressing down the earth
Was set before the King.
And those vassal kings who had come
To see it and try their luck
Threw their hands up in despair. (675)

Gautama's son said then,
Looking at the King who looked
At the beauty of that elephant calf,
That grievous bow and his daughter, (676)

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1. Vishnu.

"It was with this bow in hand
That Siva whose bow was Meru
Angered by Daksha's insult of his wife
Went in a rage to attend his yaga. (677)

"The gods who had come there took refuge
With broken teeth and broken hands
In places never entered before,
And Daksha's fires were destroyed.
And then the God, three-eyed, eight-shouldered
Calmed down a little in his wrath. (678)

"He saw how those gods trembled to behold
The bow in his hand, but he knew
That their end had not come yet,
And handed over that well-bound weapon
To a king of this race of bull-like warriors. (679)

"Need I say more of the strength of this bow?
Who can know it other than you
A benefactor as great as Siva?
And now listen to the story of Sita. (680)

"Preparing a place fit for our yaga
We ploughed many furrows on the hard earth
With a powerful steer with two long horns
As hard as iron,
A crystal yoke on its strong neck
And a plough of gold set with gems
To which was attached a coulter of diamonds. (681)

"At the tip of that ploughing coulter arose
Like the rising sun
A girl who could have been the Goddess
of Earth
Putting to shame
Even Lakshmi out of the milky ocean
Rising with nectar —
A lovely queen among women, whom that Lakshmi
Could step back and worship. (682)

What to speak of her virtues? They
  Seemed to compete for her notice.
Beauty seemed to have brought her forth
  A boon for her penance.
All maids on earth after she rose
  Were like the rivers
Whose brightness was put into the shade
  When Ganga descended. (683)

"What can be more strange than this
That skill and luck both alike lacking
All the kings of this world yet wanted her
As all the gods of the other wanted Lakshmi? (684)

"When the kings came like musty elephants
Roaring like the sea, and seeking her hand
We put them off saying that she could be had
Only by him who could string the bow
Of the one who wore a tigerskin
And wrapped himself with an elephant[2] hide. (685)

"O Sage, whose words are potent as a bow,
The kings who could neither handle that bow
Strong as a rock, nor resist Madan's
Soft as a flower, hating that bow
But loving Sita started a war. (686)

"Our king's great army grew less and less
Like the wealth of the generous
  who give it away,
While the armies of those who were in love
  with Sita
Grew bigger and bigger like that love. (687)

"When the enemy kings came to know
That the gods out of pity lent their army
To our king who was losing the battle

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2. Siva

Caused by the Bull-rider's bow,
They fled like crows in the night from an owl! (688)

"From that day to this, none has approached
This bow, nor the fleeing kings returned.
We thought that this marriage would never
take place.
If this one can string it, it will all be for good,
As Sita's own goodness will not go waste." (689)

All that that sage said, the other cogitated
And nodding his matted head looked at
that bull --
And he, thinking all that the sage thought,
Cast his eye on that long bow! (690)

Then Rama rose like a leaping flame
Of sacrifice when ghee is poured!
"Done for, the bow!" the gods acclaimed;
The sages were relieved, and blessed. (691)

Ere Rama broke that one strong bow
Ordered by the ancient sage,
Kama broke a thousand others
Aiming at the maidens there. (692)

"Too heavy is that bow," said some;
"Too bleak her life," some others said,
"If her soft hand remains ungrasped
By the big hand of this hero here!" (693)

Hands clasped in prayer, "This man", they said,
"Must string the bow and gladden us;
Else meet it is that Sita and we
Should all together court death by fire." (694)

"If our King was truly keen on this match
How utterly silly of him," said some,
"To ask a mere boy to string Siva's bow
Instead of giving him his daughter with
no strings attached!" (695)

In act and form, in dance and song
They were like themselves,
But the lids of their red eyes fluttering
Threw them into doubt.[4] (706)

"Dasaratha's son," said some;
"The Lotus-eyed One," said others;
"His body is a raincloud;"
"Very like the *kaayam* flower;"
"The world is a cheat," said one,
"This is not a man.
This is the very God
Of the fish-full mighty ocean!" (707)

"Our lady needs a thousand eyes
  To take in this lad's beauty."
"And he will need a thousand eyes
  Each time he looks at her."
"But now look at his brother!"
  "How blessed is our world!"
"Bless rather at this moment
  The sage who brought them here!" (708)

The course of events here thus,
  Let us now set forth
What happened to the golden girl –
  Slim waist and full breasts –
Black eyes red-streaked and bright –
  Resuming her life a little
When the moon and the night departed
  In the hope of seeing that Prince. (709)

Leaving her flower-spread bed
  Which dissolved her body,
Surrounded by maidens jewelled,
  Her life tossed like a swing,
She reached a lotus pond

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4. Heavenly beings are supposed to have unwinking eyes.

With a bank of stainless marble
Besprinkled cool with water
And covered with soft petals. (710)

"O lotuses, cool and fragrant,
In your great concern for women
His dear hue your leaves have brought me
And so lessened my fever.
You have shown too with your blossoms
The colour of those eyes
Which gobbled up my colour —
Why then like a miser, do you
Hold back the life that is mine? (711)

"If I can see that chest again
With its bow and string and quiver
Like mountain Meru bent for war,
His shoulder like a pillar,
The sacred thread and garlands worn —
A moon beam, dancing waves —
His hand, his shafts — I shall see again
My life returning to me. (712)

"True it is a certain cloud
Armed with a long bow,
The heavenly moon beside it,
Bees and flowers on its head,
Sucked and drained my soul away
With its pair of eyes —
But that cloud is still within my heart
And for ever and ever shall be! (713)

"When Kama with his conquering bow
Makes my life a torture
Burning it as fire burns
A helpless bale of cotton
And my mind is agitated
Distracted and distressed,
What is that manliness that won't rush
To a woman's rescue

Saying, 'There is no need to fear —
I am here.' (714)

"O tireless breasts, for ever a-surge,
What good are your leaps
Towards that heavenly moon, his face,
Riding serene?
If you can find your way to clasp
That chest with its mountainous bow,
Then take betimes the steps that will lead
To the penance that will bring it about. (715)

"Whence has this moon come
To pour its venom
On my breasts all burnt
By Madan's shafts?
It is not the moon that came
Yesternight —
For that had a dark spot
And this has none! (716)

"When Madan assailed me with his shafts
Which set me burning,
My life managed to run unscathed
And take refuge
At the feet of that dark bull —
Elephant with must,
O my heart, how did it contrive
To return to me? (717)

"Like the raincloud in heaven
Laced with lightning
He came down to earth
With his thread on his chest —
He has entered my heart,
But I don't know him;
He has entered my eyes
But I can't see him. (718)

"Like a fool who lets slip from his hand
A gold jug full of nectar,
Churned out of the milky ocean
Unavailable elsewhere,
I let slip the chance
To clasp those mighty shoulders —
What use lamenting now
At such great length?" (719)

When thus her heart all sore
The girl with the golden breasts
Plunged in a sea of sorrow
Sighed and sobbed,
Came to her a maid,
Eyes black, mind cool, a moon
Who had witnessed the breaking
Of that mountainous bow. (720)

Necklace and earrings a glittering rainbow,
Garlands and sari sliding down,
Nilamala with her long eyes
Came flashing like a streak of lightning. (721)

She did not bow, she made a racket,
Sangand danced in exultation —
"Tell me, my beauty, your joy's source,"
She was asked, and thereon bowed and said: (722)

"The son of Dasaratha, the mighty —
His host a sea, a man of learning —
The son of: that gift-raining king
Handsomer than flower-shaft Madan — (723)

"His shoulders like the peepul tree
Making us wonder whether he is Vishnu,
Rama by name with his younger brother
Has come to our city with a renowned sage. (724)

"'The royal youth has come to see
Great Siva's bow,' our King was told;
Whereon the bow was brought, and he
Strung it at once, heaven a-tremble! (725)

"Foot pressed, in a second, as if this were
A long-learnt trick, he bent that bow;
The gods applauded and rained flowers —
And to our terror it broke and fell!" (726)

"The raincloud that had come with the sage,"
"Lotus-eyed like Vishnu" —
"It must be he" -- her doubts removed,
Her left side burst her waistband![5] (727)

"She has no waist," "She has, she has;"
Her tender breasts grew hard and swelled;
"Sure it is he she has described —
Or else," she inly vowed, "I will die." (728)

Thus she, prostrated by her love —
While Janaka with a voice which drowned
The crash of that bow Brahma made
Asked a question of Kausika: (729)

"Answer, My Lord, is it your wish
That your son should forthwith wed today,
Or should I invite with beat of drum
The hero-king and his army?" (730)

When that great king spoke those words,
"It will be good," said the sage,
"If he too can come without delay.
And the King bursting with joy
Sent his men with a letter and some words. (731)

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5. For a woman a left limb trembling is an auspicious sign.

13. DASARATHA ON THE MOVE

The swift messengers running like the wind
Reached Ayodhaya with its thunderous drums,
And unable to enter and touch the King's feet
Stood at the gate, where crown clashed
  with crown![1] (732)

Getting permission, they went duly in
And bowed to his bright feet ankleted.
They praised his wonderful son and said,
"This, Sir, is what happened to your boys
  since they left:" (733)

They gave him the palm-leaf they had brought
  with them
And said, "Renowned Sir, this is our letter";
And a man of learning there took it
  with pleasure,
And the King asked him to read it. (734)

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1. The vassal kings waiting for an audience with the Emperor.

When the feats of his eldest son's archery fell
Into his ears as set forth on the leaf,
The bands on his shoulders, jewels of gold,
Burst, those rock-like shoulders expanding. (735)

"Was it the breaking of Siva's bow
Which at Daksha's yaga quelled seven worlds
Which made that great noise we heard here
The other day?" asked the warrior King. (736)

Saying that, the hill-shouldered King
Gave gauds of gold and raiments unceasing
To those messengers whose well-matched anklets
Sounded pleasantly to the ear. (737)

"Let our Princes and army proceed
To the city where Rama befriended by Madan
Resides now thanks to the penances
Of my ancestors of the Solar race,"
Ordered the King by beat of drums
On the state elephants. (738)

As was proclaimed on that day
When the lotus-eyed Vishnu, crowned with basil
Measured as his the entire world,
So drummers announced it to the army
Whose steeds resembled the waves of the sea. (739)

The army of that bull-paced King
Was like the flood at the end of the world
When a huge whirlwind sweeps all away
And not an inch of the earth is uncovered
by the sea. (740)

The chariots making the world look small
Were ridden by kings as if by the sun;
And the elephants with their jewelled frontlets
Were like clouds with flashing rainbows. (741)

The umbrellas with their tops unfurled
Were countless swans with their milky
  downs;
The hosts of flags which were upraised
Were as though the sky was peeling its skin! (742)

The flags waving on the elephants—
An army of trunks oozing must —
Looked like white clouds in the sky
Sucking the moisture from the sea. (743)

The jewels of that army flashed like the sun;
That sun put the parasols' shade in the shade;
The parasols' shade was lovelier than
  the clouds
Whose thunder was out-thundered by the drums. (744)

The jingling horses which bore the women
Were like billowy rivers bearing swans;
The female elephants bearing them
(Gold jewels, tight breasts and soft hair)
Were like clouds bearing flashes of lightning. (745)

The way taken by that sea of an army
Because of the mixture of saffron and sandal
From the women's breasts and men's shoulders
Looked as though it were a bed
On which the sexes had freely mixed. (746)

The breasts of those maids cruel as Death,
Though their red-lips' words were sweet
  as treacle,
Resembled the moon because of the pearls
And the morning sun because of the gems. (747)

The bowmen and swordsmen, their hair fragrant,
Shoulders rock-like and gold-banded
Walked by the maids with their tendril waists
Like elephants beside their mates. (748)

The *palkis* in which some women went
Showing only their chapleted heads
With their dark hair and white flowers
Looked like clouds with numerous moons. (749)

The frontleted elephants unable to cross
The mire caused by their incessant must
Seemed lost and to grope with their trumpeting
  trunks
For the elephants guarding the Earth's
  quarters! (750)

The rows of horses that could dance
  on the ground
To the tune of the jingles attached to them
Seemed scarce to touch it, like the gods above,
Or the women who tempt with their hearts
  intact. (751)

Women vexed with their lovers went
Eyes averted, sighing deep,
Their brows contracted, chaplets shed
As if they and their men were no longer one. (752)

Elephants whose eyes darted fire
  If a goad was so much as mentioned,
Oozing must like a waterfall
  Rolled along fearing none;
Dashing against hills, breaking down trees,
  Attacking their trunks,
Rubbing against them, behaving exactly
  Like a river in flood. (753)

Before that King, the poor man's staff,
Could rise to leave for Mithila,
His army from Ayodhya bound for that city
So covered the land that there wasn't space
For a grain of blackgram to alight;
It was like a banner which was stretched;
Its end on the instant at Mithila's flagstaff! (754)

The wagons carrying the women
Whose faces resembled lotuses
Were like flowery tanks on the move,
And made the youngmen capsize with love. (755)

A woman's glance out of a corner of her eye
Cast on a youth running after her wagon
Was to him as ambrosia --
Sweet nectar out of black collyrium. (756)

One who had parted from his fawn-eyed mate
Saw a swan and a lotus on an arable tract;
Stood still, and the heart within him stood
And then began to oscillate! (757)

Conches and drums made a noise like thunder;
Umbrellas and fly-whisks were white all over;
That army was like the river Ganga --
What royal insignia on the land! (758)

That army was a battlefield,
The sweet-tongued women divinely fair
Plunging into the hearts of men
Their deadly spears miscalled eyes! (759)

The shoulders of the heroes were a crowd
  of pillars,
Their swords a crowd of stars,
Their feet a crowd of lotuses,
The foot-soldiers a crowd of lions! (760)

One man couldn't tear his eyes away
From a woman's breasts held tight;
He lost his way, and like one blind
Bumped against a musty mammoth. (761)

A woman thrown off a leaping horse
Was caught by a hero with his iron hand
Who holding her wouldn't let her go,
Clasping her wouldn't put her down! (762)

A youth who pursued on his aching feet
  Red like lotuses
A woman whose eyes were black
  And sharp like arrows
Said, "This woman has big breasts
  Most desirable
But who has a chest large enough
  For this elephant?" (763)

A youth like a musty elephant,
His round tuft humming with bees,
Looked at a woman's eyes extra-sharp
And then looked at his javeline! (764)

A youth saw a maid with wavy tresses,
Feet like lotuses, dark eyes like spears,
And asked her, "You with your breasts adorned
And shoulders with long bands of gold,
Where did you, negligent, leave your waist?"[2] (765)

Of one who would not open her mouth
But only her eyes, cruel as death,
A youth asked, "If you must cross a river,
Whose lucky hands will come to your help?" (766)

Camels carrying a load too heavy,
Avoiding sweet and tender sprigs
Went after bitter things like drunkards,
Their hearts and mouths, like theirs,
  quite dry! (767)

The Gurjaris with their blood-shot eyes,
Dark-bodied men carried *kavadis*[3]
As elephants intoxicated
Poles and hammers on their necks. (768)

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2. He could not see it, it was so thin!

3. A contraption to carry a pair of jugs on a shoulder.

An elephant in heat put its trunk
On its female -- and maids riding her
Peeped through their palms only because
Their palms were smaller than their eyes![4] (769)

There were dwarfs who went with
  waistleted women
On elephants whose tails touched the ground,
Like toads on tortoises in a tank
Covered with fresh lotuses. (770)

A horse carrying a slender maid
Pursued by an elephant with a pole tied
  to it
Ran bending and stretching its legs
  as if saying,
"This maid is not earthy, she is Heaven's
  King's". (771)

All the maids ran in exultation
When they heard the sweet news
  that the Prince
Had broken the bow, their hair undone,
Without a thought of their broken waistband. (772)

The Brahmins pushed forward with their
  ritual jugs
And umbrellas, hopping, hands never lowered,
Regulated their breaths as prescribed
Avoiding with care the elephants and women! (773)

The maids with their fragrant tresses
Conjuring the form of Rama
Said, "If you have come to welcome us,
Get into this chariot." (774)

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4. They pretended to shut out the sight but really saw it (with relish!) their eyes being so large -- a sign of beauty.

Because of the noise raised all over
By the chariots, elephants, horses and drums,
None could hear what the others said,
And the folks moved on as if they were dumb. (775)

The group of women in their clothes
Fine as webs woven by spiders,
Their dark hair humming with
the noise of bees
And their feet jingling with little bells
Was like a tank with the charm of birds. (776)

Girls fair as Lakshmi from the milky sea
Peeping through holes in curtains
Made the youngmen who saw their eyes
Raise joyous hums, like bees excited
By the must trickling from elephants. (777)

The anklets worn by these dark-eyed beauties
Struck the musical note *uzhai*
To which like thunder from the clouds
The horses neighed in unison. (778)

The eyes in the bright faces of those
Whose tread filled the earth with delight
Seemed to the youngmen who saw them
Bees haunting lotuses, to Madan's joy. (779)

With waists hard even to imagine,
Lips red as coral, and sweet speech,
The fragrant dust from their breasts
like cocoanut
Filled the earth -- as did the army's. (780)

Many and many such men and women,
Their numbers past thought, guess
or description,
Went in huge chariots handsomely carved
In thick crowds, making a lot of noise! (781)

The dust that was raised by
  the harnessed horses,
  Chariots and soldiers,
Spreading fast and high, closed the holes
  Of the streams from the clouds;
They plugged the holes too through which
  the must
  Would have flowed
From the elephants guarding the world's
  Eight directions! (782)

Their shelf-hands grasping their swords as well,
Youths took in their right hands
  that of their wives'
Making them cross with their jewelled feet
The muddy stream of the elephants' must. (783)

Young women asked their husbands to pluck
From fields, meadows and tanks,
The *naidal*,[5] *kumudam*[6] and lotuses
So like their hands, face, mouth and eyes! (784)

The maidens getting off their horses
Heard that the elephants were coming,
And clutching their saris ran like peacocks.
Their hair and ornaments unheeded. (785)

Umbrellas, elephants, flags and plumes
Intermingling spread darkness,
While weapons, crowns and ornaments
Spread light night and day at once! (786)

Men shining like the sun made way
Warned that their throngs would be out through
By the swords honed sharp in the faces
Of the women with lotuses for visage,
The *palasa*[7] for mouth and pearls for teeth. (787)

But the women stumbling cannot move,
The knots of their strings giving way

5, 6, 7. Different flowers.

And the gems and pearls getting scattered
Irretrievable because of the crowd --
Their tender feet treading them get hurt,
And their tinkling anklets lament this. (788)

Musical gear making a noise like thunder
everywhere,
The bullocks tied to wagons terrified ran away
And the poor maids stood around
like frightened swans.
As for the bullocks rid of their burden
and now unattached
They must have felt like Yogis,
sorrowful no more. (789)

Elephants huge as hills got into the
tanks on their way
And ignored the balls their mahuts discharged
With the speed of the wind to hit them.
They dived in the water enjoying themselves,
Their bumps and tusks like women's breasts,
Refusing to come out.
They were like Airavatam[8] with palm-like trunks
Emerging out of the milky ocean. (790)

Musicians and dancers like Kinnara couples --
The women dark-haired, sword-eyed,
luscious red-mouthed,
And the men expert in playing on the vina --
Went riding on horses and producing music
Sweet as honey and without a slip. (791)

When a mahut raised a goad
An elephant calf, small-eyed and heated,
Must dripping from it like a waterfall,
Plunged and scattered the people.
The bees sucking its must
Migrated to a female elephant,
Attracted by the sweet scent
Of the hair of the women who rode it. (792)

8. Indra's elephant.

Drums beating, elephants, chariots, prancing
horses,
Red-streaked, spear-eyed women, and men
Filled the streets apace, like the sea
under a full moon,
And the King's favourite wives started
on the journey. (793)

Like a radiant swan in a lotus forest
Kaikeyi got into a *palki* begemmed,
Surrounded by a thousand courtesans
To the sound of sweet music,
goddesses outshone. (794)

Two thousand maids, lotus eyes red-streaked,
Rode on mules with jingling bridles
Surrounding her the mother of twins[9]
In a *palki* set with sapphires --
A lightning in a raincloud --
To the tune of music from the vinas. (795)

The great Lord's mother[10] went in a *palki*
Set with gems like numberless stars,
Her face with white teeth and red lips
A very moon, while musicians sang
The *pandi*,[11] and heaven's denizens bowed. (796)

As if there were no women elsewhere
In this world seven-seas-girt,
A throng of maids with lovely hands
Carried peacocks, swans, poppets, minas,
Dolls and fly-whisks white as conches. (797)

Body-guards, eyes afire even without cause,
Canes in hand, dressed in tunics reaching
to their feet,

---

9. Sumitra, mother of Lakshamana and Satrughna.

10. Kausalya, mother of Rama.

11. A raga.

Rode on horses jingling or went on foot,
Peremptory, closely guarding the damsels. (798)

Hunchbacks, dwarfs, pigmies, friendly groups
Went on white palfreys as if swans walking,
While maids, hair flower-laden and humming
with bees,
Walked beside like female elephants. (799)

Sixtythousand maidens, breasts soft like
lotus buds,
With a beauty indescribable, better than
Lakshmi's,
Went in cars beyond compare, set with
various gems,
Corals, flashing emeralds, pearls and gold,
Looking like pictures surrounding the queens. (800)

Like the four-faced Brahma riding on his swan,
The husband of Arundhati,[12] the Queen
of Chastity,
Went in a *palki* of pearls mid rom
two thousand men,
Who had drunk with their ears
the nectar of learning
Till it sated, and could offer with their hands
The oblations the gods desired. (801)

War elephants, horses, gold chariots, and men
Surrounding them before and behind
Like the sea surrounding a high mountain,
The Fortune-favoured Princes,
divinely weaponed,[13]
Great car-warriors both went behind the sage
Like the two who had gone earlier
that other one. (802)

---

12. Vasishtha, the King's priest.

13. Bharata and Satrughna.

The King adorned with pearls and diamonds
Left on the auspicious day
After the daily rituals
And taking the Lord's feet on his head.[14]
He gave away to the Brahmins
With a glad heart
Countless gems and gold
And rows of kine and lands. (803)

Eightthousand of the twice-born
  Bearing jewelled jugs
Chanting the Vedas
  And sprinkling holy water,
A crore of red-lipped women
  With their sweet tongues --
Traditional blessing-invokers
Their waistbands encrusted with gems --
  Went singing with the King. (804)

"He didn't see me;" "But *I* caught his glance;"
"My earring has fallen;" "Can't get nearer now;"
"He is on a triumph;" "Hence the conches blew" --
Such were the remarks of the kings
  crowding round. (805)

The stream of horses, their necks adorned
  with gold,
  With the golden girls astride of them,
Was as though the waves of the sea
  Were surrounded by lotuses.
The minor kings with their javelines
  Joining their hands together
Were a field of lotuses
  Which this king, a strange sun

---

14. A form of devotion peculiar in Vaishnavite temples to this day, the devotee's head being covered with a metal crown bearing on top in a small replica the two feet of Vishnu.

Going in his chariot
  Instead of opening folded up! (806)

The heaps of dust that were raised
Rose to the sky and came back,
Spread in all directions
Making each invisible to others.
They seemed to run to the seas
As if they would silt them up.
Because of their enmity
To Sagara's progeny.[15] (807)

While the sky thunder was out-thundered
By the conches, flutes, and horns,
Cymbals, trumpets and drums,
Hangings, parasols and peacock-feathers
Held the sun at bay
And the King's white umbrella
Putting the moon to shame
Frightened and confused the gods. (808)

The noise of the mantras and the conches,
The Brahmin's blessings and the drums,
Elephants' trumpetings, time-keepers' chants
Filled the quarters as the King went like Indra. (809)

The ankleted kings their palms folded
Looking at him whenever he looked,
The elephants, chariots, horses and footmen
Raised enough dust to change heaven to earth. (810)

When the elephants, chariots, horses
  and footmen
Finding nowhere else to go
Bent the back of this earth of ours,
How can one claim for this King
That he came to relieve her burden? (811)

---

15. The sea which was caused by the sons of Sagara digging up the earth.

Thuswise the King covered two leagues,
And reaching the terrace of Indusaila,
The army rested there
Smelling of the women's dark hair
And their breasts' sandal-paste. (812)

A mahut tried to appease a tusker
With sweet words like a minister;
But that tusker like a wilful king
Rejected the advice based on books. (816)

An elephant not seeing its rival in the forest
Smelt it and pursued it trumpeting like thunder;
It flew like the wind, hawks behind it,
As floods take the course of a previous flood. (817)

An elephant catching the smell of ichor
Which came from a flowering *paalai* tree,
Ran from its stake, and tossing its goad up
Ground with its forelegs that tree to powder. (818)

The countless elephants and calves mid the trees --
The cows with red marks painted on their foreheads
Resembled the herds of forest elephants
And handrasail was like their master. (819)

That higher men clear-headed mixing with
  the lower
Improve the latter must be true --
The chariots rolling with their wheels of gold
Made even the black stones take on their colour. (820)

The forest peacocks trailed the fawn-eyed women
Gazing at their waistlets and golden hue;
Perhaps they thought that their lips' redness
Was due to the cochineals their teeth had
  seized! (821)

Alighted from their horses and walking
  like cygnets
With their waistlets, earrings and other jewels,
The maidens took shelter in the shade of the trees
Shining like tendrils covered with flowers. (822)

Tired with travel, they rested on a rock,
Bees humming round those lotuses,

their faces and feet,
Their images reflected in a crystal
Confusing their maids on another rock. (823)

Some maidens like tendrils got off their
elephants,
Clouds bearing lightnings come down to earth,
And entered a lodge ,their anklets tinkling
As if Lakshmi left her lotus to dwell
in that place. (824)

Horses well-fed with startling neighs
Brought by Turks from various cities
Were tied up in rows in a stable
Like many-coloured gems on Mother Earth's
breast. (825)

They hung long curtains to resemble waves;
They put up shops to resemble seas;
They tied up their elephants like a rack
of clouds;
They had horses in rows like breezes in chains! (826)

The fawn-eyed maids walking like peacocks
And the heroes with lances were quite confused
Till the thunderous drums, the blowing conches,
And the flags showed them the King's residence. (827)

Youngmen removing the dust from their bodies
With cloth as white as the foam of milk,
Their young maids thereon took the brightness
Of paintings that have been furbished. (828)

Princes came down from their elephants
Like strong lions from mountain tops --
Flywhisks on both sides like spread fronds,
They entered their tents in shining rows. (829)

In every tent of white cloth with its flag
The faces of maids beaming with smiles

Were like the spotless moon in the sky
Whose image was reflected in the sea's
white waves. (830)

Falling to the earth and rising up,
One side black the dust shaken off,
And the other white the dust remaining,
A musty elephant was like Vishnu-Siva![2] (831)

Like a good man mixing with a bad
And on knowing his nature giving him up,
The horses first rolled in the dust
And then shook the dust away. (832)

As one who breaks from the triple bond,[3]
Realising his self and the way of salvation
Takes the straight path to heaven from his home,
The horses broke away and then returned. (833)

The dark eyes of the maidens visible
Whenever the snow-like curtains were shaken
Were like the *kaayals* going up and down
On the waves of the sea when it is stirred. (834)

The rivers with their clear water
Though they could not give as when flooded
Gave what they could to one who dug,
As the generous even in days of want. (835)

Shaking the thick hair on their head,
The jewels in their necklaces flashing fire,
Youngmen entered their sweet tents
Like fierce lions their mountain caves. (836)

---

2. Hari-Hara, Vishnu and Siva represented in one body, the Vishnu-half coloured black, the Siva-half white.

3. The love of land, woman and gold; or egoism, delusion and deeds.

Huge tuskers, foreheads vermilion-covered,
With hair as sharp as spears and teeth,
Muddied the water in clear streams
Like Madhu and Kaitabha[4] the dark sea. (837)

The dark elephants unmindful of their mahuts,
Unbothered by the *kaayals* which nibbled them,
And refusing to get back to the bank
Were like foolish men running after harlots. (838)

The place where the men rested with the women
Was like the sea covered with clouds
Dark and silent, being the smoke
Which issued from the *akhil* that was burnt. (839)

The Vidhyadharas, denizens of hills,
Who came to see this flood of an army
Were astonished and knew not themselves
When they saw these youths and maids
As if heaven had come down to earth. (840)

All the women there, even the sulkers,
Or those too early roused from their sleep
Spoke sweetly with the koels, let their
  anklets tinkle,
Wore jewels that outshone the day
Flashing like lightning, and walked
  like peacocks. (841)

And all the men, their anklets tinkling,
Bees humming in their garlands,
Swords gleaming at their waists
And rubies glittering on epaulets
Looked at the hills tall as their shoulders
And roamed about like fierce lions. (842)

---

4. Two demons who tried to kill Brahma and were destroyed by Vishnu. According to another version it was Uma (Parvati) who killed Kaitabha and Krishna (Vishnu) is often referred to as Madhusudana.

15. The Mountain

Let us now describe that mountain
Which the kings, their wives, princes
  and princesses
Had reached with the army, making it look
As if the seas round Meru had come to seize it. (843)

Tuskers stretched their long trunks there
And plucked the branches of heaven's palms,--
Bees singing, beetles dancing, --
To give them to their cows dear as their lives. (844)

The beetles tired of sucking the honey
Of the *vengai** which serves as the time-setter,
To the red-lipped, blue-eyed musical tribals,
Leapt at the stars as at a new bunch of flowers. (845)

While the moon, heaven's tusker with the
  stars, his cows,
Pierces with his horns and lets honey drip,
The red-millet hillmen cultivate their paddy
Using the water of the Milky Way. (846)

That mountain too high for the moon to cross
Made the Lord of the stars stand still

---

* A tree.

And serve as a mirror to both sides --
The tribals on this, the nymphs on the other. (847)

The hillmen plucked the moon and held it
Against the brow of their young women,
Whose eyes sharp as cruel spears
Unheated by any forge's fire,
Untipped with venol, uncleaned by ghee
None the less did their deadly work. (848)

Cloudlets sported in their courtyards
With their lovely elephants' calves --
And the crescent moon, a child himself,
Crawled with the babes of the bright-browed
women. (849)

That mountain bore two sets of footprints--
On its sapphire slopes, of fierce lions'
Which had slaughtered in wrath black
mountainous elephants,
And on the dark tufts of the Vidhyadaharas
The red soleprints of their petulant women. (850)

Red *kaayal* eyes *not* reaching their ears,
Smile unseen, hair *not* loosened,
Brows steady, their lotus hands
Playing on the strings and producing notes
Attuned to their throats and oozing nectar
Entranced the very kinnaras. (851)

The saffron paste of the chapleted women,
Hair oozing honey, sword-eyes reaching ears
Reddened the waters in their crystal banks
And turned them to wine in a jewelled cup. (852)

The garlands which the damsels in heaven
Threw away in their petulance,
Their dark eyes moist and red with rage
To the distress of their men folk,

Were to be seen there everywhere,
Their flowers unfaded, their honey unspilt. (853)

The hill maids, hue like mango sprouts,
Bedecked with leis the areca palms
And compared their tresses with their spathes;
And the heavenly maids decked the *kaandalam*[1]
With their bracelets of brilliant gems
To see how far it resembled their hands (854)

The heavenly maids, their bent brows steady,
Sang to the strings and danced like peacocks,
The gem-strings they threw sulking away
Monkeys picked up and work to their mates' joy. (855)

The elephant-cows rubbed against red rocks
Where sandalwood grew, and seemed painted
  with saffron;
And the sky seemed for ever red
Because of the rays of splendid rubies. (856)

The dashing cataracts were like pearls
Fit for the goddess of the Earth;
White like Ganga, and sweeping down gold
They were like Vishnu's upper garment. (857)

They picked the ponnai blossoms
  And those of the cardamom;
Wore them, drove the bees away
  And imbibed the toddy neat
And after watched the kinnaras
  Playing on their lutes
Which drove away the ennui
  Of the horse-faced goddesses. (858)

The women nestling joyously
  Their breasts against the youths

---

1. The gloriosa superba.

Saw female bees from the trees
  In buds which resembled their breasts
Mating with the male bees
  From their own black hair. (859)

When the women with faces like the lotus
  or the moon
Walked into water they thought was crystal
Their clothes, both upper and lower, got wet,
And the ankleted heroes, clapping their hands.
Decked with the *kadagam*,[2] laughed. (860)

They saw couches of flowers and discarded
  garlands,
Globs of betel, half-chewed and red,
And beds of tender leaves that were scorched
By the bodies of Vidhydhar women
Maddened by separation from husbands
Dearer to them than their lives. (861)

They saw nymphs on fragrant swings,
Black eyes rolling, red lips spread,
Rare necklaces swinging on big breasts,
Bees dancing in their hair, earrings
  in their ears. (862)

They saw many wine cups left alone
By sweet-faced, red-lipped women,
Bees, beetles and wasps
After draining them,
As men are left as sapless
By women who sell
Their gold-decked middles. (863)

They saw ornaments cast away
With the garlands from *kalpaka* trees
By bow-browed nymphs in union
With strong-limbed gods
On crystal beds whose blaze
Turned night into day. (864)

---

2. A bracelet.

Some women saw a *kaandal,*[3] took it for a cobra
  And closed their spear-like eyes;
Some saw the image of a flower in a rock[4]
  And asked their husbands to pluck it. (865)

Some tore the leaves of trees and covered
  their breasts
  With bits and pieces of thee;
And some plunged multi-coloured into pools
  Like swans no hills could have borne. (866)

The mid part of that mountain shone
With the glow of the mango sprout;
Deer, elephants and snakes
Were the creatures round it;
And its bamboos and *punnai* branches
Competed with the hillmaids' limbs. (867)

The boars dark as night
Falling into a mire of *kumkum*[5]
Rubbed themselves against trees
Of mango and sandal wood --
Girls there resembled goddesses,
And the large tract resembled heaven. (868)

Pythons moving hot for food
Uprooted the bamboos which fell;
Wild cows running raised the dust;
And water rushing down the hills
Scattered pearls and raised a noise! (869)

---

3. Gloriosa superba.

4. Polished like crystal.

5. Red powder applied by women to their foreheads in the shape of a spot, both as a mark of beauty and to indicate their marital state. Only virgins and wives are supposed to wear it, not widows.

The sword-eyed women's breasts bedecked
Nestling against the lion-limbed men,
Pearls and *akhil* paste rested there
While sandal and *akhil* rested on the hills. (870)

That ancient hill was thick with bananas
And the banana stalks were like women's thighs;
The tribal girls sang like kinnaras
To the kinnara lutes on which they played. (871)

The must streaming from elephants
Made trees and bamboos insecure;
And goats and other animals
Went to the streams to quench their thirst. (872)

That the dark tribeswomen on those rocks
Might dig for the roots on which they fed,
Huge drums were beaten there
To scare the nearby tigers away. (873)

Elephants bathing in the pools
Damaged the bo tree and the lotuses;
And lions strode fierce among the trees
As bees hummed joyous in the nymphs' hair. (874)

Its top surrounded by the clouds,
Its lower half by garlands,
That mountain looked very like
The Lord of Lakshmi chapleted. (875)

Like bees round a flower tasting honey
Youths and maids haunted that hill,
Stayed on the terraces steep and broad
And, loth to leave, indulged in games. (876)

They never even thought of descent
As that would breed a woe unique,
Like the blessed ones in Paradise
Who can never forget their bliss therein. (877)

That hill beclouded was an elephant
Which the fierce sun attacked like a lion,
And the blood which was spilt in consequence
Reddened all the sky around. (878)

The huge trees with their sturdy branches
Lit by the red sun looked fresh-leaved;
And the mountain bathed in the evening rays
As if all its limbs were ruby-decked. (879)

As it was beautiful to behold
And its crests innumerable
Wearing sandal on its chest
That hill resembled the dark-hued Lord.[6] (880)

Linked to each other like body and soul,
Garlands on chests humming with bees,
The men and women gathered there
Like tuskers and cows, bucks and does,
Lions and their lionesses. (881)

The sun in the sky on his one-wheeled chariot --
A maned lion with a fierce look --
Disappeared behind the mountain
And darkness emerged like a herd of elephants. (882)

The army of the King of Kings,
His hybiscus garland oozing honey,
Was a roaring sea of lotuses
As lamps were lit within its ranks. (883)

Out of the cool sea rose the moon;
And in the sky surrounded by stars
It looked as if the waves had spumed
A conch with a number of radiant pearls. (884)

Jealous of the sea which smelt of fish
And produced its single moon,

---

6. Vishnu.

They army-sea produced a crore --
The faces of its god-like maids. (885)

Wherever the dancers danced arose
The music of drums, the song of maids,
The twang of the strings, the clapping of hands,
And the sound of flutes startling
heaven itself. (886)

The women drying their hair with *akhil*
Replaced their strings of gems with pearls,
And tired with one kind of jasmine
Wore garlands of a smaller kind. (887)

Mingled noises rose in the air --
The songs of those tying up elephants;
The prattle of lovers on a happy spree;
The jingling of courtesans' waistlets;
And the trumpetings of elephants in must. (888)

Love's nectar sweeter than
tongue could taste
As prescribed in learned works,
Nymphs wooed according to their moods
Tuneful songs and dance-dramas
Occupied that entire night. (889)

16. PICKING FLOWERS

Angered by the dark Titan, Night,
With the stars in the sky for his fangs,
The sun rose out of Udayagiri
Like the Man-Lion out of the pillar of gold,[1]
His thousand rays, his hands. (890)

After his daily rituals,
The other kings bowing to him,
Dasaratha in a huge chariot
Left with his large army
There were groves everywhere,
Red *kuvalais*[2] in pits
And lotuses in the fords
As they reached the river Sone. (891)

They reached that river and the army rested.
When the sun rose to the zenith

---

1. Narasimha, one of Vishnu's incarnations, when he leapt out of a pillar to kill the rakshasa Hiranyakasipu.

2. Flowers.

The kings and their sons, the men and women
Went to a grove with meadows and tanks
Cool and fragrant,
Full of flowers haunted by bees. (892)

The peacocks seemed to make way for the women
As if afraid of the shafts from their brows,
And the swans seemed to fly away
Shamed by their gait, their feet tinkling
With anklets which sounded like humming bees. (893)

With their earrings of gold, glittering, divine,
Bees on their garlands as they danced
  with their friends,
The women resembled sprouts so much
That the men around couldn't tell them apart. (894)

When the women came, their middles adorned
  With gem-set gold plates,
Their speech like music, their hair fragrant
  Humming with bees,
The koels stopped chirping, not out of fear
  But bashfulness --
Who can open his mouth in front
  Of a practised speaker? (895)

Their eyes looking sweet as nectar
  Though deadlier than venom,
Some women put out their lotus hands
  To bend tall flower stalks
Which at once dipped and rained blossoms
  On their ankleted feet --
Who will not bend before beauties
  With waists like tendrils? (896)

If at the touch of the flowery hands
  Of those resembling Lakshmi
Even men strong and cruel as lions
  Bend their rock-like shoulders,
Is it a matter worthy of mention
  That slender and delicate stalks
Bend low to yield their tender flowers
  To such great beauties? (897)

Bees saw lotuses and kuvalais abloom
Not in rivers and lakes
  but tendrils moon-faced;
Struck with wonder they would not move;
What wonder if those who run after wonders
Are loth to leave them? (898)

There were stalks which bent obliging
To youngmen with rock-like shoulders
And dazzling bodies
Wearing garlands of fresh flowers
As though they were women exhausted with love;
While other stalks stood stiff
Like women who would be wooed! (899)

Some pretty women seeing stalks without
  flowers
Were sad to think how they would look
To their husbands, and so took off
Their pearls and gems, waistlets and earrings,
And decking those stalks gazed fondlyatthem! (900)

A swarm of bees sucking honey from flowers
Left them and sucked the hair of women
Which was bare, rid of the flowers it wore;
What pleased them once pleased them no more--
Doesn't good by its nature prefer the good? (901)

A maid whose beauty could beautify Lakshmi
Saw her own image in a crystal rock
And thinking "My husband will love
  this as his life,"
Stood still, flower in hand, and shed tears.[3] (902)

---

3. The usual interpretation of this is that the maid mistook the image for a live woman, and jealousy induced her tears. But surely the poet may well have meant that the maid's tears were at the thought that the husband's love would be for that youthful image and cannot be presumed for all time to come.

A woman with her face a clouded moon
Saw a king take a garland off his shoulders
To put it round the neck of one like a peacock,
And tears from her sword-eyes rained on breasts
Which tore her blouse and broke her waist. (903)

A lover king testing his wife's mind
Hid himself in a creepered spot
And she, never apart till then,
Was as a body quivering after its life! (904)

Her collyrium eyes turned red with anger
A woman wouldn't ask her a spearman lover
To get a flower beyond her reach
But asked a koel instead! (905)

Looking at cocoanuts on a tree
Said a chieftain, "How like woman's breasts!"
"Which woman's?" fumed his poor wife,
And sobbing perspired all over. (906)

A youth whose shoulders waxed like a hill
At the mention of war
Looking like Madan and plucking flowers,
Had his eyes closed from behind by his wife--
Her hair like a cloud, her voice the koel's;
"Who is it?" he asked, whereupon
She belched fire.[4] (907)

A King who stretched his lotus hand
To pluck a flower that had blossomed that day
Caught between his two wives
Would neither give it nor refuse,
Like a miser keeping his suppliants
In suspense! (908)

---

4. At the thought that any woman other than herself could possibly take such a liberty with him.

A spear-eyed woman whose husband was her life,
When her husband called her by her co-wife's name,
Her pride offended and coming to a head,
Smelt the flower in her hand which was
scorched at once! (909)

A king went around in a big chariot
So that the eyes of high-born women
Might feed on his beauty as bees feed
On the must which drips
from an elephant in heat. (910)

A king faultless in his beauty
Divided between his two wives --
One with a forehead like the crescent moon
And the other whose beauty Lakshmi
might praise—
The flowers that he had gathered.
And both of them flung these flowers away
And their eyes blazing, departed
Like a peacock with plumes spread. (911)

One seemed to search for honied flowers
As if for life or something dearer
Neglectful of her hair and clothes
And the pearls which dropped along that grove. (912)

Sweet like a lute and lovely like Lakshmi
Another held back when her husband wooed;
But repenting when he left
Sent her parrot after him
And then went herself searching for it! (913)

Struck by a hundred thousand shafts
Of Love, a youth who did not know
What to do or what he said
Asked for *mandara* of a *maadavi* plant,
His heart lost to two fragrant breasts! (914)

For ever grumbling at her husband,
Angry, enjoying his defeat,
An inconstant decked herself
With flowers gathered with great care,
Looked at her mirror again and again
And wilted in frustration. (915)

Another was displeased with her jewels
Which had no effect on her hero husband.
"I have no wish to live," she said,
"What use these jewels?" and gave them away. (916)

One lost her parrot in a shrub,
Her trembling waist couldn't bear her breasts
Nor her bodice contain them;
Her fingers held a cup of gold. (917)

Seeing a swan with gentle gait
And convinced it was her friend,
One said, "Your nudeness will scandalise"
And dressed that bird with her own clothes! (918)

One whose words were sweet as treacle
Seeing her middle through her sari
Thought she saw a hooded cobra
And afraid of a peacock, hid herself --
Her tendril hands covered her eyes
For very shame! (919)

One who was lovely beyond compare
Said to her friend, "Gold, honey, Lakshmi,
Come and find me if you can,"
And hid herself in a thicket.
But when the friend could not find her,
She came from behind and closed her eyes,
Said, "Now you can find me, I am sure,"
And burst into laughter! (920)

There was one who roamed in that grove,
A bow in one hand, a lotus in the other,

As if he was the sun at whose sight
The lotus faces of the women would blossom. (921)

Men so handsome that even Madan
With his sugarcane bow could be put to shame
Studied their sweethearts' love prattle
Like songs divine or sacred lore. (922)

In the evening when Madan the shepherd
  Blew on his pipe -- the bees --
And announced it was time for the men and women
  To get back home,
The maids who had gone to gather flowers,
  Their eyes dark,
Gathered like cows around their men
  Who walked like bulls. (923)

That a sage's firmness is a guard
  Against Madan's bow
Is only a saying; for in truth
The brow of a maiden plucking flowers
  Can lay all the sages low! (924)

Even when he was plucking flowers
A youth could not forget his love;
However much one gains in wisdom
Who can resist a woman? (925)

Lost in the thoughtss and looks
Of one whose image
The very gods could not have drawn,
One on a branch plucking flowers
Plucked the buds and sprigs as well! (926)

His hands winsome like bamboos,
One looked at his wife,
Her curls bee-haunted;
Her mouth red and trembling
Proclaimed her wrath --
But all at sea
He knew not what to do. (927)

Tired of plucking flowers
And the other things done so long,
The men and women now turned their hearts
To sporting in clear water. (928)

17. SPORTING IN WATER

The youths and maids saw a flowery pool
Humming with bees, and went to it,
Striding like elephants in a forest
And putting the gods in heaven to shame. (929)

They plunged into that pool there
As the maids and treasures of Heaven
Disappeared in the Milky Ocean
That day when in his wrath
The sage who resembled Siva.
Cursed the King of Heaven.[1] (930)

The black *kuvalais* were like the maiden's eyes
And the maidens' eyes, large as their palms,
Were like the *kuvalais*,
The red lotuses were like their faces
And their faces were like the lotuses! (931)

---

1. Reference to Durvasas indignant at Indra's treatment of the garland he had presented to him and cursing him. Vide Appendix stanzas 481-501.

Some clasped their husbands' chests
  As Lakshmi Vishnu's
Some clung to their husband's shoulders
  As victory a hero's.
Some sprayed water around
  As though with a fan;
And some would not leave their men
  Afraid of the swordfish. (932)

Some spattered fragrant powders
  At each other,
And unguents which attracted bees;
  Flung flower garlands;
Discharged water on their husbands
  With syringes,
Or splashed it with their lotus palms
  On their faces. (933)

Some had waists like lightning,
  Shoulders like bamboos;
Some rising from the water
  Pushed their long hair back;
Some asked the swans to come
  And play with them;
And some winced when even flowers
  Hit their breasts. (934)

Some had throats musical and red
  Like corals and lotuses;
Red-mouthed, black-eyed, waistless ones
  Sweet like sugarcane,
Who saw that the tank was full of *kaayal*
  And asked their husbands
Oh, so sweetly innocent,
  "Have tanks too eyes?" (935)

There was one with a fragrant garland
  The bees would enjoy,
Fine body, abundant tresses, in looks
  A very goddess,

Who saw her own image in the pool
  Laugh when she laughed,
And taking it for a friend gave it
  The necklace she wore. (936)

Some walked to the banks, their garlands
  Attracting bees,
To clasp their diamond-shouldered lovers
  Earrings flashing --
Their pearl-strings glittered, and they walked
  Like a flock of peacocks
Gentle, on high hills which reached
  The very sky. (937)

Some offence had taken place
  Hard to guess
Which made a maidens' eyes
  Red with rage;
But when she went into a lotus field
  The offending youth
Could not make her out at all
  From the flowers. (938)

And lastly there were those
  With tendril hands
Decked with golden bracelets
  And with conches,
Who dived, and their waistlets sliding down
  To their small feet,
Stood trembling at the thought that a snake
  Might have bitten them! (939)

Mid those women diving and sporting
Stood a king with an epaulet
Like mount Mandara surrounded by the maids
Who rose with the nectar churned from the sea. (940)

Circled by women with their jewelled hands,
Red mouths, white teetch, and tendril waists,
Another stood like tusker in must
Midst its cows in a forest pool, lotus-fenced. (941)

There was a third surrounded by women
With dark hair like a raincloud rack --
Peacocks shaming a flock in the forest,
While he resembled the moon in heaven
Beset with stars in the Milky Way. (942)

One women lay amongst others
Like a lotus among common flowers,
A pupil who could please Madan her master,
Her two eyes a match for his five arrows. (943)

One, a bright face midst her friends,
Stood a veritable army of spears --
Her mates though lovely like peacocks
Were common tendrils compared to her
Who was a sprig from the Milky Ocean. (944)

She borrowed her middle from a chariot
  And her breasts from the cocoanut tree,
But her bright beauty she could not have
  borrowed
  From anyone else!
She dived into the water
  With her breasts banded tight
And the face imaged in its clear stream
  Was the very moon! (945)

Shoulders like hills, middle unbound
  Breasts challenging jugs
Each pushing against the others
  Spread the water beyond its banks. (946)

Red lips turning pale, eyes turning red,
Sandal paste wiped out, sari loosened,
The drawings on their breasts disappearing,
The pool was to the women like their husbands, (947)

Good company, it is well known,
  Makes oneself good --
So even the fish smelt of honey and saffron,
  Teak smoke and *akhil* smoke, why say more? (948)

The sandal paste on the chiefs' bodies
And the saffron on women sporting
Changed the colour of the stream
Like a red streak in the blue sky. (949)

The *akhil* on their bodies washed away,
The maids, sweet-tongued and red-mouthed,
Shone like precious gems polished
By a whetstone. (950)

The sandal mark gone made by her
On the shoulders of her leonine hero,
The eyes of a maiden turned red
With wrath.[2] (951)

A woman bathing in a stream,
Her body aflame with love's heat,
Set the very pool on fire
With all its fresh and fragrant flowers. (952)

One brought some water in his hand
And poured it on his beloved's face
A king-tusker bathing with his trunk
The Goddess Lakshmi on her lotus.[3] (953)

A cygnet on a lotus flower
Seemed to trample it in wrath
Because it resembled the feet
Of those whose gait put the bird to shame! (954)

The sandal paste on the women's breasts
Washed clean, nail marks on them exposed,

---

2. Because of her suspicion that some other woman was responsible for this.

3. A common motif in painting and sculpture.

How many men must have burnt with desire
Looking at those stringed golden jugs![4] (955)

A potentate with a long hand
  Which looked like a lotus stalk
Asked for an assignment
  In sign language;
And one with a mouth like the *veezhi* fruit
  Gave a reply to it
Through her companion's eye to which
  She sent her message through a corner of hers![5] (956)

Lotuses that were displaced
  Because the stream was disturbed
Looked as if they had hidden themselves,
  Shamed by the faces of women
With lovely eyes like spotted deer. (957)

After these benefits received
  From their bath
The ankleted men and women
  Deserted the pools
And got on the banks to assume
  The right clothes
And ornaments which didn't beautify
  But burdened them! (958)

That large pond deserted
  By the men and women who enjoyed it

---

4. A pitcher of water with sanctified strings around it is part of many rituals.

5. In the days when it was improper for a woman to meet a strange man, much more to declare her love to him directly, a girl messenger became a necessity, and the convention arose in Tamil poetry of the invariable presence of a girl companion to the heroine.

Was like a sky deserted
  By the cool moon and the stars,
Or a tank deserted
  By the lotuses in it. (959)

The sun saw those water sports
In which the men and fawn-eyed women indulged,
And wishing to do likewise himself
Sought the fish-filled seas. (960)

As weak kings who are defeated
  Go to war again,
The moon for ever vanquished
By women with lotus faces
  Rose once more in the sky. (961)

18. WINE AND WOMEN

The moonlight spread all over, cool
Like toddy white, a frothy flood,
Like Music's self that lay a-stretch,
Like love suppressed which bursts its bonds. (962)

Madan's agent, the moonlight
Was sweet as toddy to those together,
A burning venom to those apart,
And a new and helpful go-between! (963)

It made all streams the Ganga river,
All seas the Milky Ocean famed,
All hills eternal Siva's Kailas --
What more can we say of the moon abounding? (964)

Each man and thing in every quarter
Bathed in the moonlight; and the earth sea-girt
Seemed to have donned white garbs befitting
The birth of Madan with his sword and fish. (965)

Pandals with pearls descending like stars,
Dark screens with garlands of flowers,

Woods with pavements shining like pools
Were the resorts which attracted women
in herds! (966)

Sweet-tressed women, all agog
For sexual contests on well-laid beds
Imbibed the fresh wine in golden goblets
As if it was nectar churned from the sea! (967)

Neither the nymphs of heaven nor fairies
Could compare with these earthly women
Of flesh and blood and gazelle eyes
On whose lips the wine was like honey on
flowers. (968)

The toddy white as milk in the cup
Reddened by the girl's hand which held it
Turned to honey and then to nectar
Whereon her black eyes became red. (969)

The wine which these women drank,
Their tresses fragrant with flowers and myrrh,
Was like the ghee poured on sacred fire,
And set their dormant love ablaze. (970)

A bright-browed one with killing eyes
But with words like nectar to restore life
Saw herself in the wine she held
And said to that image, "Sup with me, dear"--
What folly can rival such great folly? (971)

One with a waist so thin it might break,
Wavy tresses, spear-eyes, red mouth,
Saw a cool face in her cup and jeered,
"Ah looney lick-spittle, what have you done,
That while all this toddy is right here
You should lap up my left-over?" (972)

A non-pareil with spear-like eyes
To the jeers of those around

Mistook for toddy the moonlight
  Flooding her jewelled cup;
And thinking it was filled again
  With the sweet liquor
Put it to her mouth, and then
  Confused, imbibed her shame! (973)

A flower-lipped one whose prattle
  Seemed to have given sweetness
  To the sound of lute and flute
Saw within the mud pot
  Containing the toddy
  Sweetened with the *kuvalam* flower
Her own sword-eye's image
  And taking it for a beetle
  Tried to shoo it away! (974)

Her eyes set joyous and rolling
  By the toddy she had drunk,
One with heavy jewels
  Saw the moon without reflected
In the liquor pot before her.
"O Moon," she said, "don't fear;
  You have fled from the serpent on high
    And taken refuge in this pot.
No harm shall come to you." (975)

Whether because her senses had fled
  Or of her innate foolishness
One whose belly-button was
  As a river bubble transfixed,
Looking on the moonlight streaming
  Through a flower-decked roof
Took the dazzling flood for toddy
  And caught it in her cup. (976)

One with a lightning waist,
  As her ambrosial speech
Stuttered because of toddy,
  Suited action to word:

Took off her waistband and circled
 Her middle with a flowery string,
And used the band of gold to plait
 The tresses on her head! (977)

Seeing in the jewelled cup
 Her own joyous face,
A woman mistook it for the moon
 Fallen for the toddy!
"If you swear to keep me cool,"
 She said, "when, heat-oppressed,
I sulk and put my mate away,
 You can have this toddy." (978)

A gem-decked woman, her nose like the
 sesame flower
 Did nor realise that her shaking hand
Had spilt all the toddy on her couch;
 And thinking there was still some left
Raised the cup in her hand
 To her lips ruby-red. (979)

Beset by bees rising up to the skies
 Like suppliants around a miser,
A woman afraid to open her mouth
 Red as a lotus oozing honey
Imbibed the toddy in her cup
 Through a reed with a hole. (980)

A women with eyes, swords out of scabbards,
 Scattering the *kayals* in a lotus tank --
A young peacock with flower-soft tresses--
 Would not drink any toddy
Because her lover ever in her heart
 Had no liking for it. (981)

One under the influence of drink
Put on the act of a Fury
Eyes red and killing, brows raised,
Gnashed her teeth and clapped her hands! (982)

The perspiration of a woman
Biting her red lips
After drinking the moon-white toddy
Was as though
What she took in came out! (983)

The redness of her *kovai* lips went to her eyes;
She thought one thing and stuttered another;
The bow on her lotus forehead was bent;
Its crescent moon came out in drops. (984)

Whether whelmed by toddy or sex,
Red lips lose colour, the mouth foams,
The breast is bared, the sari awry,
And hair and words both fly loose. (985)

Her waistlet ringing with bells,
She sent her maid to her absent lover;
"Tell him my mind's agitation
Caused by Madan.
And friend," she added, "will you too
Like my heart be lingering with him,
Or come back quick?" (986)

A deer-eyed woman sent a valiant king
One after another all her maids;
They went and went and never came back
Until she too went. (987)

A honey-tongued girl on a bed of flowers,
  Her love a boundless sea,
Heard her parrot recite her husband's names
  And embraced it overjoyed. (988)

A bright-browed damsel on a fragrant bed
  Embraced the parrot beside her.
"You haven't today brought my life to me--

What good are you, *anril?*"[1] she hissed
and wept. (989)

Her arms bedecked, a peacock in looks,
When her husband called her by her
co-wife's name,
She flashed a smile with her pearl-like
teeth,
But tears rolled down her *kayal* eyes. (990)

He seized the waist-band which enclosed
His angry sweet-heart braceleted;
But broken ere *its* pearls rolled down
The pearls from her eyes reached the ground! (991)

Flowers on her hair, much mused a maid --
"Shall I hold back when he arrives?
Or end my torture joining him?
Or on a vina sing his praise?" (992)

She seized her lute and tightened its strings
Till her flower-like palm grew red --
The *sang* out her inmost thoughts
But why she was vexed wouldn't *tell*. (993)

One tender like a flowering stalk
Drew circles to find out her luck;[2]
Each time they failed, Madan's darts
Never failing made her squirm --
Only her sighs proved that she lived! (994)

With slender fingers made for play
She sent a message to her lover;

---

1. Though in form a parrot, in function it is an anril recalling for ever with its melancholy note the absent lover.

2. A way of finding out -- called Koodal -- by drawing circles blindfold whether one will be united to one's lover or not. If the last circle meets the first all will be well.

But when he came, she slammed the door
We know not why. Her eyes were red. (995)

Stretched on her flower-bed, she was
 now for it --
But her lover could not guess;
So she woke from her feigned sleep,
Lay straight, and asked for the time! (996)

Annoyed she kicked with her saffron foot,
And her lover's hair shot up and bristled,
As though a fertilised paddy field,
With love for its crop, got a welcome shower! (997)

A swordsman victor over an enemy king
Saw the drooped breasts of his lady love;
His joy flowed over, his face beamed,
He felt his own arms tighten and swell![3] (998)

A handsome fellow reached a bed
And saw upon it flowers spread,
All burnt as if by Madan's shafts,
And stood transfixed, by thought submerged. (999)

A woman's breasts with their dried
 sandal paste
Are to a swordsman returned from war
Jugs of water for the coronation
Of one requested to rule the land. (1000)

Eager to reach her bosom-lord
She doffed her jingling necklace
 and waistband,
Took off too her diamond jewels

---

3. His joy at being missed by his beloved was greater than his concern for her!

And to the treacherous moon gave a
withering look.[4] (1001)

What shall we say of such strength?
A thin sugarcane of a man
With diamond shoulders which cannot break
A garland a koel in a grove put round him? (1002)

Her tresses unbound, to tell her sorrow
She looked at Madan[5] and at her maid;
And she, taking in the hint,
Betook herself to the youngman's house. (1003)

A peacock heavily-decked raced to a youngster
With a fierce sword in his hand;
Was it shameless toddy, or the covert evening,
Or the God of Love? Who was to blame? (1004)

Vanquished by intolerable love,
Her brow a crescent, she shed tears of rage.
"What ails you, my dear," said her victor
and laughed --
Then she too laughed and shed her shame. (1005)

A no-waist girl took her hand away
From the youngman she was holding --
She took her hand, but not her heart;
But her strange act pierced his heart! (1006)

A gentle soul, her hand on her favourite maid,
Would fain send her with a message
to her lover;

---

4. The moon normally welcome to lovers not separated could be a deadly enemy if it exposes one going to one's tryst!

5. A mural picture?

Begin to speak, too shy to speak won't speak --
And so spend all the night in endless sighs. (1007)

Her heart dripped love for him
Constant in his love for her;
To a friend of hers she would
And would not talk of him;
And so indulged in words
That made no sense. (1008)

He and she in form diverse
Were in their life and soul but one;
Being in their love too one
Their bodies clung in union! (1009)

Her shoulders like the bamboo when her
husband came
Her thoughts outpacing her, she went and
stood before him;
But her moon-like face was cast down --
And that sight so strange unnerved him. (1010)

To one pining alone
A friend who returns by herself
Is no better than a mother --
Like night and the South
A sheer torture! (1011)

One whose fate is to love
Is in the evening a thing possessed --
Eyes fixed, stockstill, unheeding,
Her senses gone with her messenger! (1012)

She can't forget, she looks for her lord,
She lives and dies, she lives and dies --
Like lightning hidden in a cloud,
This flowering plant comes out, goes in! (1013)

She kneaded with her jewelled hands
Her surging breasts Madan's arrow ploughed --

Cried and laughed and told her woes
And begged her friend to go-between! (1014)

What need to put in words to the wise
One's yearnings and one's anguish?
So she perspired within,
Grew hot, went thin, and drooped,
And looked hard at her friend. (1015)

Madan thrice as jolly
As young girls with budding breasts
Must be making their minds his thoroughfare
And drinking bout for bout with them! (1016)

Youngmen with fragrant garlands and cool tufts
Doffing the garments of nubile women,
Will put away too their jingling cinctures.
Who wants trumpets for secret deeds? (1017)

What wonder if one puts away
  Jewels and clothes, the mere externals?
One bright-browed woman rid herself
  Of even her inward shamefastness.
Like a true ascetic who discards
  Every single thing he owns
Love too is quite capable
  Of giving up its very self! (1018)

A youngman like Madan peerless
  And a young woman like Sri
In a combat of love on a bed
  Won't yield one to the other;
Both of them alike --
  Their life too is one;
Their senses identical --
  Who shall vanquish whom? (1019)

With her eyes like slaughterous words
  She kicked the broad chest of her lord

Very like the god Kumaran.[5]
And when with his flower-like hand
He protected himself and his garland,
"You want to guard your secret love
Hidden there, do you?" she hissed,
And grew angrier still. (1020)

Coral lips oozing milk
Thick breasts and soft shoulders
Eyes like spears,
With these
A girl with a gentle mien
Mated with one whose love
Was like the surging sea --
A large-handed raincloud --
Gave him heavenly bliss! (1021)

A peacock from a ragi field
Full of wrath at her husband's lies
Engaged in a war of love with him:
But what triumphed in that war
Was not her wrath but the love in her heart! (1022)

With eyes that pierced like deadly spears
And limbs which pierced her clothes
She clasped her husband who had a chest
Like a rock unpierceable --
And then she looked at his back to see
If her breasts *had* pierced him! (1023)

Their breasts' saffron dried up and dropped;
Their hair was loosened, bangles rattled;
Their clothes unwound, anklets grew noisy
As the young maids were gorged by their lovers (1024)

---

6. Subrahmanya, son of Siva..

The love of this jewelled peacock
Was indeed a sun,
But she would not let it scatter
The mist of her coyness --
And so pretending to sleep
She clasped her husband tight
As if but in a dream! (1025)

She a peacock bright
And he a prince among men
Got their chance
And clasped each other.
They wouldn't let go,
Didn't see day break,
Knew no way
To unclasp themselves! (1026)

Between those heroes,
  Joyous elephants full of must,
And the maidens
  With their long black hair
The night wore on
  Becoming less and less
Like waists that cannot cope
  With the burden
    Of tight-rubbing breasts! (1027)

The moon withdrew like the wealth of those
Who stop midway in doing good;
And up the dark sea came the sun
  Like the queen-jewel blazing
  on Vishnu's chest![7] (1028)

---

7. The gem Kaustubha identified with Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort whom too like that jewel he clasped to his heart.

19. THE WELCOME

The King of Kings never going astray
Nor ever giving up the Vedic ways,
Wise and just under his white umbrella,
Reached Ganga with his army, a sea
Into which flowed the rivers of must
From those mounts, his frontleted elephants. (1029)

That army well equipped with arrows
Drank so much of the Ganga water
That the river shrank, and one could see The Naga
world neath its white sands,
And even the sea with its brackish water
Thirsted for the sweet river. (1030)

While this King of all the world
Went towards Mithila water-girt,
Let us narrate what Janaka did,
Strong-shouldered, merciful, king of horses. (1031)

His heart bounding at the King's approach,
Girt round by elephants, chariots, horses,.
As if the moon to meet the sun

He rose to meet him whose wealth matched
  Indra's (1032)

The army of the Ganges land
Meeting that of Sita's father
Was like all seas, conches blowing,
Meeting her mother, the Milky Ocean.[1] (1033)

The army of the javelined King
With its elephants, horses, chariots and men
Could be compared only with
The seven seas rising together. (1034)

The white umbrellas with their tassels
  And peacock plumes
Shut the sky out, hiding the light
  And spreading darkness,
And were like so many lotuses
  Red and white
Covering the surface of a tank
  With their petals. (1035)

Where dwelt his Lakshmi? We do not know.
  On his flag? His sole umbrella? His state?
His army like the sea? His crown?
  Or the chest of that never idle King? (1036)

The seven-noted sounds that were heard there
Were only the bees' hum in women's hair,
The chariots' noise resembling the seas,'
And the elephants' resembling the clouds. (1037)

The dust raised by that army
Not only silted up earth's seven seas

---

1. Her mother, the Milky Ocean: Lakshmi whose incarnation Sita is rose out of the Milky Ocean when it was churned for ambrosia.

But reached also the seven worlds above
Through the hole in the sky made by
Vishnu that day![2] (1038)

The darkness caused by the tall umbrellas
Crowding together and veiling the sky
Was dispelled by the light that was shed
By the gold ornaments of that army
Flashing like lightning and rainbow.
The sun and the moon. (1039)

When that faultless King of Kings
And Janaka the strong bowman
Travelled to meet each other,
Scented powders, gold drops and pollen
Were the only dust on the road. (1040)

Honey, jellied musk and saffron
Mixed with *akhil* and sandal paste,
And must dripping from the elephants
Were the only mire on the road! (1041)

The victory flags and canopies
And the white umbrellas which absorbed
The light that flashed from women's jewels
And the gold and the garlands,
Provided all the shade on the road. (1042)

When the matchless might of Dasaratha's
army
Was met by Janaka's brimming with joy,
There was a noise as if a river
Was flowing into a boundless sea. (1043)

Janaka, Lord of Elephants,
Came in a chariot fast as his thought

---

2. When Vishnu as Trivikrama measured first the earth and then the sky for the three feet of land he had been promised by Bali.

Impelled by desire indescribable
To greet the father of all the world. (1044)

He got down from his big chariot,
While his huge army halted behind;
And Dasaratha extending his hand,
He quickly ascended his car
Who, face beaming, embraced him. (1045)

Like a lion greeted by a tiger
Stood Dasaratha, foremost of all,
Asked after Janaka's friends and kin,
Made him precede and arrived with joy. (1046)

When these two arrived together
Out of that city came to greet them
He who resembled himself alone
Whose raised shoulders had broken the bow
Of him who resembled a red-hot flame.[3] (1047)

Worthy of worship by gods, men and Nagas
And with an army of horses and men from
  that city,
He came with his brother to meet the King
In a chariot of gold set with emeralds. (1048)

Who could count the numbers numberless
Of the elephants, chariots and horses
Which, ordered by Janaka, went with those
  warriors
When they came out to welcome their father? (1049)

His hue the hue of dark-blue flowers,
His beauty beyond a painter's skill,
The lad whom the very gods could worship
Approached the King, soul returning to body. (1050)

---

3. Siva.

The army bowed, and he fell at the feet
Of his father, and rising was embraced;
His lofty shoulders which broke that huge bow
Disappearing in the chest of that second Manu. (1051)

When the younger Prince fell at his feet,
He whose fame as sorrow's relief
Reached the eight quarters high over all
Clasped him to his garlanded chest. (1052)

Who can describe the joy in their hearts
When he who broke with his triumphant
  shoulders
That great bow which Siva had held
Bowed likewise to the mother who bore him? (1053)

Just as his father had embraced him
He clasped to his bosom Bharata, his life
Whose rapt love for him, as he fell at
  his feet,
Made his eyes glisten with unshed tears. (1054)

Those two Princes, delighting in the names
Of Rama's shadow and Bharata's brother [4]
Touched with their fragrant tufts the feet
Of those two with their golden anklets. (1055)

Like their great father who thought his wealth
Lay in just rule and tender mercy,
Those four steeped in virtue
Walked in the way of the four great Vedas. (1056)

He whose righteous rule was a model
And whose mercy made him a mother to all
Told his son to go ahead
With all that splendour which was
  around him. (1057)

---

4. Lakshmana and Satrughna.

We know not the extent of their love,
Nor how small or big their guiltless joy,
But when those Princes joined them
The joy of that army was like their father's. (1058)

His loving brothers on either side
Rapt in joy, riding on horses,
Conches blowing, drums beating,
He went in a towering chariot. (1059)

Pretty, red-soled girls from mansions
Whose tops were always capped with clouds
Crowded all space and darted their flower-eyes
As he went through fortressed Mithila's
  streets. (1060)

Their bracelets tinkled, tresses slid,
Their anklets kept the time prescribed,
Their surging breasts put tusks to shame,
Though the places where these women crowded
Were really not dance-halls at all! (1061)

Girls and women, from five to forty,
Impelled by Madan, gathered there
To see that First of Gods approaching --
We shall tell now their state
  on the streets. (1062)

20. THE BRIDEGROOM'S PARADE

They crowded quick, hair wet with flowers,
A herd of deer, a flock of peacocks,
A gallaxy, a series of lightnings,
Bees humming and anklets tinkling. (1063)

Their city's jewels, they swarmed around,
Hair afloat, waistlets slipping,
Saris loose, waists unbalanced,
Saying only, "Make way, make way!" (1064)

Like water rushing into a pit,
Their dark eyes larger than the sea,
Anklets tinkling, garlands shaking,
Straining their slender waists they ran,
As if to overtake their hearts
Gone ahead pursuing the hero. (1065)

"It is Love in person we see with our eyes;
The benefit of womanhood we reap today,"
Said they, a deer herd sighting water
On land gone dry with no rain from heaven. (1066)

Those who flocked to see the foot
Which released Ahalya's rose-red body,

And the shoulders which shot up like hills
To break the bow for the dark-haired girl
Were on the streets like a swarm of bees
Humming around a pot of honey. (1067)

His chariot drawn by leaping horses
He seemed to those with unwinking eyes
The most precious of their organs --
The very apple of those eyes --
And so to justify the name
By which he was known in their language.[1] (1068)

As the women in that city wailed
to themselves,
"Faster than thought his chariot will speed,"
The one who caught and held in her eye
Him who had measured earth and heaven
Must be regarded as great indeed! (1069)

There was one whose years should have made
her "discreet"
Who seemed to have thrown discretion
to the winds,
Her delicacy, clothes, good name and bangles,
Her nature, mind, feeling, beauty, sense,
brightness,
Her jewels gem-set, shame and innocence,
Reserve and every womanly virtue,
Save her life alone, and with that she
stood! (1070)

Another stood, long eyes shedding tears,
Pierced by the shafts from the sugarcane bow[2]
Which left not a thread's breadth on her
breast --
An earth-born lightning resembling her
waist! (1071)

---

1. Rama meaning "that which pleases".

2. Of Madan, God of Love.

Whether the maids with their delicate fingers
Got their eyes dark by gazing at Rama
Or Rama got his dark complexion
From the gaze of their eyes, we do not know. (1072)

One with a mango-sprout complexion
Saw Madan's shafts everywhere
And wondered who this bowman was
Defying the King and daring the hero. (1073)

One fair as Lakshmi, a very picture
Of love ineffable by a great artist,
Felt even her body a burden, and threw
Everyting away except her sari. (1074)

A woman with eyes spear-like and deadly,
Brows perspiring, heart aweary,
Sickly pallor bespreading her limbs
Seeing no one except the hero
Wondered hopefully if he was alone! (1075)

Another with black hair, red mouth,
Bright brow and a melting heart,
Said to her friend, "I have entrapped
The rogue who entered my heart by closing
My eyes tight -- come, let us to bed!" (1076)

A lovely statue, Mohini's self,[3]
Cared neither about Madan's shafts
Nor her waistlet and sari bidding adieu --
But just looked daggers at the lookers
at Rama! (1077)

With her eyes glad and graceful
Long enough to meet her hair
Secretive and cunning at times
Open and frank at others,

3. Mohini: A personification of feminine beauty.

Red-streaked, black and white
Spear-sharp and spear-bright,
One came for a cool sight
And went back all a-fire! (1078)

A generous maiden eager to see
But held back by the racks of dark hair,
Ample breasts, and jewelled bodies
Which made it hard to get a view,
Managed to look through the empty spaces
Left by the women's narrow waists! (1079)

Not an inch to spare had that city's streets
Covered by Madan's flowery arrows
That had pierced the maidens' hearts,
Burning jewels, waistlets, pearls,
Sandal off perspiring breasts
Bangles of conch and chaplets of flowers
Fallen from tresses which unbound! (1080)

Who saw his shoulder, saw only his shoulder;
His foot, his foot; his arm, his arm;
Which sword-eyes caught his form complete?
What single creed grasps God entire? (1081)

Who can be greater than him
  Who kept within his stomach
The entire universe,
  But now entered the heart
Of a long-haired, short-waist girl
  Only to make her live? (1082)

A woman with lots of hair and jewelry,
  Waistlets and anklets tinkling --
A tender sprout who had walked all the way
  Was led back by wailing friends. (1083)

A maid bejewelled, breasts lotus-buds
  Said, "You hard-hearted man
Pulverised for the sake of one

A bow as big as a hill.
Bless you! Can't you, for another's sake
Break a sugarcane bow[4]
If thereby you can make that other
Entirely your own?" (1084)

"Is this a trick or a dream?"
Said a woman dark-eyed and bright-browed,
"That instead of coming in a precious carriage
He has come alone and stands before me?" (1085)

Her heart her only messenger
One inly drooped and said,
"What penance Sita lotus-eyed,
Jewelled maid must have performed!" (1086)

One a faultless statue
But agitated sighed and cried,
Tired and much distressed
Adoring asked her friend,
"Can Madan draw such an image?" (1087)

A bright-browed, sweet-mouthed one
Said, "Come to think of it,
Such beauty is not human.
You will soon discover
That this is God himself." (1088)

A bright-browed woman worn-out,
Her anklets and bracelets slipping,
Said, "It is Janaki's penance
Which has brought this spotless one here." (1089)

A woman with a gold-decked waist,
Her beauty deserting her,
Distressed said in tears
"If only he would come alone
In my dreams to me
Without these sages and kings!" (1090)

---

4. Madan's.

Another, a golden tendril,
Like a peacock in a forest
A rain cloud will delight
Thought she would hide her love --
But Madan knew about it;
What face will not betray
The love within a mind? (1091)

A woman, eyes long, a very moon
Hugged her bed of flowers
And her lovely breasts perspiring,
All her senses lost,
She drew a long sigh
Like a snake hearing thunder. (1092)

These girls so many, red lips ambrosial,
Suffered each one endless agitation;
They had no hope like slim-waist Sita --
What chance had they of survival? (1093)

"This red-eyed Rama will not see
Or think of any of these sorrowing women,
Perspiring, tired and weary," said one;
"Is this Mr. Purity incapable of love?" (1094)

Numberless the women of that city
And infinite the beauty of Rama --
What could even Madan do?
His shafts exhausted, he clutched his sword. (1095)

Apart from the women of this world
The havoc in heaven which Spring's
  King caused
We do not know -- We can only say
That his shafts hit bosoms there as well. (1096)

"He doesn't seem to want a thing,"
Said one, "from the women entranced by him.
Doesn't he know what mercy is?
Is he out of this world or a murderer?" (1097)

Sandal-paste on her hot breasts
Her waist the shape of an hourglass
A lovestruck maid was unaware
Of what she did or ought to do
And looked so tired they feared for her life. (1098)

A woman who spoke sweet as treacle
Went back and forth after the hero's chariot,
Her tender feet getting calloused,
Her mind and heart as if on a swing. (1099)

One deluded by excessive love
Looked hard at another and aske her,
"Did you spot my mind at that place?
Can shame be there where love is?" (1100)

A golden girl there wanted to know
Whence he got his cruel nature
Which denied their own lives to them,
When those of his race had given their lives
To anyone needing them in order to live. (1101)

A beauty dying for his love
Said he must have, in her view,
Broken that bow so well-guarded,
Not out of love for sweet-tressed Sita
But merely to show off his own skill! (1102)

One whose garland, clothes and jewels
Were slipping like her hair and her very life,
Said, "If Madan can kill me here
Right in front of this terrible archer,
Who can be deemed stronger than him?" (1103)

The women crowding around him thus,
The hero surrounded by the kings
Reached the hall where Vasishtha
Was waiting with Kausika, expert in the Vedas. (1104)

Lakshmi's Lord fell at their feet,
His necklace of gems flashing like lightning,

Like a rainbow-cloud in season,
And duly honoured both of them. (1105)

He who took birth in Ayodhya
To guard Dharma, ascended the seat
Carved like a flower, shown by them,
His brothers like his shadows on either side. (1106)

The King with his family reached that hall
Which resembled the throne room in Vishnu's
  land,
Like the moon high up in the sky,
Stars and planets in his train. (1107)

He bowed to the feet of those two sages,
A rain of flowers falling on him,
And blessed by the Brahmins ascended his seat
Putting even Indra to shame. (1108)

The Kangas, Kongas, Kalingas, Kulingas,
Singhalese, Keralites and Pandias,
Assamese, Chinese, Kulindas, Awantikas,
Bengalis, Malwas, Cholas, Marathas, (1109)

Magaḍhas, Matsyas and Mlecchas,
Heroes from Ilada, Vidharbas,
Outer Chinese, Dakshinites, Chenchakas,
Somakas, Sonakas, Turks, Kurunadis, (1110)

Yadavas armed, Konkanis seven-fold
Chedis, Telugus and Canarese --
Came, all these bright-crowned kings
Covered by the canopy of heaven. (1111)

Women whose words were sweeter than sugar
Stood with fly-whisks on either side
Which seemed to rise to the very heavens
Like the King's renown, a towering tree. (1112)

The invocatory benedictions
Sung by the maids, the flowers in whose hair
Attracted bees, beetles, and chafers,
Were well attuned to the flutes and lutes. (1113)

A benign tree, tall, cool, upsurging,
The white umbrella of the King
The eyes of whose tuskers belched fire
Was as though the moon had come
To attend his sister's wedding![5] (1114)

Because of Dasaratha's host, a sea,
Leaving no space for anyone to move
The entire country of Janaka
Was as one large, crowded city! (1115)

What more is there to say than this
That the love abounding of Sita's
  father
Exhausting his treasures in his joy
Was given in equal measure to all --
To the lowliest no less than to Rama! (1116)

---

5. The moon and Lalshmi (Sita) both arose out of the same Milky Ocean.

21. THE ADORNING OF SITA

Girt round by women pretty as pictures
Dasaratha looked like Indra enthroned.
Then Vasishtha said sweetly to Janaka,
The sceptred king under his white umbrella,
"Please send for the fawn-eyed maid." (1117)

Janaka heard and joyous and respectful
Told the women, "Bring forth the Princess;"
And those sweet maids, their love abounding,
Went quickly and informed Sita's attendants. (1118)

Eyelids hide eyes but are deemed to adorn them,
So these jewels which only hid Sita;
This world of ours never lacking fools
They sweetened nectar, beauty beautified! (1119)

They put a chaplet of flowers on her head
Making it look like the moon in a raincloud,
Her dark hair taking the colour
Of the great Lord's complexion --
As if that, in all her thoughts,
Shot out like flags a-flutter
And spread over the entire world. (1120)

Like a cluster of stars in the sky
Seizing the crescent moon urged by Fate
And a cloud which had calved the moon
Twisting its tongue to lick it,
A circlet of diamonds was set on her head,
And the hair on her forehead hung with
with a pendent. (1121)

They decked her ears with dazzling drops
Which oscillated to and fro
Like her own heart which did not know
Whether the breaker of Siva's bow
Was the youth who had shattered her life too
And seized all her womanliness
Or another -- a different one;
Were they the same or were they not? (1122)

Round her neck where the great conch seemed
to lodge[1]
They hung many perfect jewels --
When her name blesses each marriage string[2]
What string shall bless her own marriage? (1123)

How describe the pearls on her breast?
A gallaxy of stars unerring?
The flashing crescent cut into bits?
A bashful smile escaping her lips? (1124)

Her body's colour ambrosial
Made her red feet redden the lotus;
Her breasts reddened her pearl strings --
Our colour comes from our company. (1125)

---

1. A lovely neck is in Tamil poetry often compared to a conch. Here it is Vishnu's conch itself to which Sita's neck is compared.

2. A Tamil bridegroom weds his bride not with a ring but a string. The adjective "tiru" meaning "sacred," attached to the word "string" in this context, also means Lakshmi the goddess of beauty and wealth.

Her breasts vermilion, full, upsurging,
Were a heavy burden to her slender waist;
The only rivals for her shoulders
Bamboos with blinding pearls and gems. (1126)

The lotus hands of Janaki --
Her hair bedecked with flowers --
Had gained by her penance
The boon of Rama's hands.
That they might not close at night
Her maids encircled them
With bracelets set with jewels
Resembling the morning sun! (1127)

On her breasts -- two jugs of gold --
They drew with sandal paste
Tendrils and Madan's bow
Adding thereby to the weight
Too much for her waist already
Which like Almighty God
Both was and was not, as creeds
Diverse diversely maintain! (1128)

They put round her waist with its
  silk tucked in
A lovely waistlet set with gems
And under that a string of pearls
Resembling the stars in heaven,
Whose dazzling brightness which issued
From the bride's own red complexion
Was enough to blind the eyes of those
Engaged in her adornment. (1129)

Her middle was like a cobra's hood
And her feet red without painting
Was softer than the *aniccham*;[3]
And the anklets fitted to them sighed,
"How delicate, O how delicate!" (1130)

---

3. A sensitive flower which droops when exposed or smelled.

Her eyes like rain benign and cool
Strangers to theft and deceit
Looked as if round black venom
Was a circle of nectar white.
Red-streaked they went long and straight
And came back. As for their blackness
Was it due to collyrium
Or her dear lord's raincloud hue? (1131)

Her face a red lotus
  with two blue lilies
A jewel on her brow
  like a star neath a crescent,
They put a beauty-spot
  on herself a beauty-spot
Of all the women on earth,
  the underworld and heaven! (1132)

They adorned her plait, head and ears
With divers flowers which drew
Beetles, chafers and bees
And smeared her with gold-bright pollen. (1133)

They went round her with a lamp ghee-fed,
Sprinkled water, scattered flowers,
Placated the gods, gave gold to the Brahmins,
Put a spot upon her forhead,
Whirled before her the *arathi*,[4]
And circling the peacock that they had reared
Ensured her safety with a *raksha*.[5] (1134)

Like bees sucking honey from a lotus
They fed on her beauty
Who spoke sweeter than a parrot;
They knew not what they said,
Stood transfixed and transformed --
Aren't the feelings
Of men and women the same? (1135)

---

4. Vide note to stanza 530.

5. An amulet.

The dark-haired maidens stood entranced
By this full moon with her jewelled breasts;
Each woman in our world may boast
one beauty --
Who can resist all beauties in one? (1136)

She who was chaste as Arundhati[6]
Was like the hero, conch on hand
Shared with him the lotus for her place
Famed like him, her thought in all minds --
What more is there for us to say? (1137)

Waistlet and anklets shaped like a snake,
Tinkling ornaments round her feet,
Girt round by girls like Indra's handmaids
She moved with her retinue speaking
so sweet. (1138)

Surrounded by dwarfs and other short women
Who bowed to her feet and went with her
She came like the moon with a host of stars
A brilliant light that would never go out. (1139)

She walked in the blaze of the jewels she wore
Which seemed like a bed of flowers
on the floor
Spread for her soft feet by the Earth,
The beautiful goddess who had given her birth. (1140)

She came like a peacock with its plumes spread
Fly whisks waved from her foot to her head
Like the swans which had come to watch
her gait
Rising and falling, won't go, won't wait! (1141)

She came under a canopy exceeding bright
As if the sun in a blaze of light

---

6. The wife of Vasishtha.

Had come to see this gain to the race
Of the precious eye of the world's face! (1142)

She came on dainty steps, clothed tight
The gems in her waistlet scattering light,
Armed as though with a blazing bow --
Herself a sword, moving soft and slow. (1143)

The sheen of gold, the scent of flowers,
 the coolth of sandal paste
The glitter of lightning, all commingled,
 carefully without haste,
Putting swans and goddesses and ambrosia
 to shame
She reached the jewelled hall wherein
 were gathered kings of fame. (1144)

Like the Vedas self-created[7]
Her pure body and full breasts
Reduced all the men and women there
To unwinking and breathless statues. (1145)

The sea-hued saw that ambrosial maid
And straight was reassured
Like Indra when he got the nectar
Which ensured his life. (1146)

"This red-lipped koel has brought to me,"
Said the hero to his heart,
"From that high tower down to earth
The long-churned nectar my virtue earned;
But is this all within my mind
Or has it a place outside?" (1147)

"Since Rama the boon of our penance,"
 Vasishtha rejoiced,

---

7. The Vedas have no human origin, nor had Sita who rose from the earth.

"Is only the lovely-eyed first of gods,
With discus and conch,
This lily maid can only be
Lakshmi the Lotus-throned." (1148)

When he who had gone round the world
And held it under his just sway
Saw that maid with her lovely hair,
"All seven continents," he said,
"I have ruled, but only today
Have I found my fortune at last." (1149)

When that sweet-tongued maid arrived
All except the sages and kings
Closed their palms above their heads
Convinced that she was a goddess --
Isn't our body our mind's slave? (1150)

She who had left her lotus seat
To enter a king's palace
Bowed to the Emperor and sages
And took her seat near her father
Whose eyes were bedewed with tears. (1151)

The archetype of sages thought
"If this is indeed the Lotus Maid,
Won't Rama that jade mountain break
For her, not just this one bow
But all seven mountains of the world?" (1152)

She had heard the story of the bow
How it was bent and broken
And now she saw the truth direct
And started shedding her fear.
Even so with a corner of her eye
As if to adjust her bangle
She made sure that the youth outside
Was the one within her heart. (1153)

The stream of her dark eyes flowing
  Into the ocean of his
She regained her life and heaved
  A sigh of happiness.
It was as if the jewelled queen
  Had for herself alone
All the nectar that ever was churned
  To gorge and fatten thereon! (1154)

She saw that he who stole her heart
  Was the one who broke the bow
And then her sorrow reached its end
  As the delusion of those
Who in this world seek for the truth
  And gain salvation at last. (1155)

"What day, Sir, should the wedding be?"
Asked the King of Elephant Kings
Kausika the master of learning,
"Of that slim-waisted maid
Which will usher boundless good to the
  world?" (1156)

"Lord of fertile fields", said the sage,
Where jumping *vaalais*[8] and leaping *kayala*[9]
Break the buffaloes' brains and backs
And *veraals*[10] spread open the palmtree fronds,
The fitting day will be tomorrow." (1157)

Told this Dasaratha took leave of the sages
The vassal kings rising with folded palms
To the blowing of his own gem-set conch,
His gold crown glittering like the sun
And repaired to his palace. (1158)

8, 9, 10. Three different kinds of fish, big, small and medium-sized.

The swan girl too left, loth to go;
Rama entered his jewelled lodge;
The kings departed, the sages went
And the sun sank behind Mount Meru. (1159)

22. THE WEDDING

Everyone from kings with tuskers
To sturdy youths and those between
Well looked after by Janaka
Felt as if they had entered heaven! (1160)

As those who are thirsty feel frustrated
When they see a tank but no way to it
And strength exhausted feel perplexed,
So Sita felt, the Golden Koel. (1161)

"O cruel night," she said, "who will
Kill a weakling treacherously?
Let the sun but rise and my Lord will come --
Be gone quickly, get away! (1162)

"O my mind, fain would you go
With that dark sun, and with him return.
You have been so long with me
Can't you stay just one day more? (1163)

"O *anril* on your palm tree, will you be guilty
Of killing me secretly when I am alone
And the dark night roaring like the seven seas
Will never cease because of my fate? (1164)

"O Moon, your beams a sharp lance
Burning like the hot sun,
Who would deprive of his life
An innocent waning day by day? (1165)

"O South Wind, a tiger in a cave
Cool and fragrant but not to me!
With your hot breath and moon-beam fangs
Are you prowling for my life? (1166)

"Why does a warrior night and day
Roam like a raincloud in the street
Trailing an unmarried girl?
Does this become a Prince well-bred? (1167)

"That cruel man, dark and wicked
Won't come to me. Would it be proper
For me to seek him? Is this night
A black sea shoreless lasting aeons? (1168)

"The songs don't stop, day doesn't dawn;
Thoughts don't flee, night doesn't end;
Heart-ache lasts, life doesn't leave;
Eyes don't close -- O what a fate! (1169)

"Tell me, Sea, are you too a maid
Cowed down by Madan's killing shafts?
Your bangles loose,[1] body aweary,
Now up, now down -- no sleep at all!" (1170)

While thus she spoke variously
Tired and distressed, but in virtue firm,
Let us tell what the spotless one
Thought that night in his lodge. (1171)

"I saw her once and my boundless love
Drew with my eyes her picture in my heart.

---

1. A conventional way of indicating of woman's losing her strength and girth because of love-languishing.

I saw her again, but have yet to see
The fulness of her beauty. Who can grasp
  lightning? (1172)

"O Moon, with a face like hers and Lakshmi's,
Love's embryo, manure, seed and fruit,
What have you done? Are you incapable
Of helping one who is helpless and alone? (1173)

"The night has spread like the dark eyes
Of her who has taken possession of me,
Pushing my very life out of me.
It won't grow less, like the shame of a man
Who deserts his lord in the field of battle
In order to save his own life. (1174)

"My mind, you who have gone with that gazelle,
Have you too lost all memory of me?
Is it that you don't think of me,
Or is the distance too great for you
And you will not bid goodbye to them
Who care not to ask you who you are? (1175)

"That poison is only to be found
In the fangs of snakes whose eyes spit fire
Is an ancient story. In my case
It is in the soft glance of one
For ever in my eyes and heart. (1176)

"When there are so many mountains,
Flowery lakes and groves around,
Why should a honey-tongued, bright-tressed
  woman?"
Choose my heart for her playground?" (1177)

While the Lord divine was thinking thus
The order went by drumbeat on elephants
That Sita's wedding would be next day
And the city should be decked with gems,
  and flowers. (1178)

Hearing that order, old men and young
And elegant women with fragrant locks
Rushed with their dear relations
And crossed at last the sea of that night. (1179)

Hearing of that wonderful marriage
Of the dark-hued Lord to the Lotus-dweller,
Furious with night the Sun in his chariot
Came up to see his scion's[2] wedding. (1180)

Many hung streamers, covered pillars,
Clothed the jugs which were filled with
  water,
Set jewelled pots on the tops of mansions,
And feasted the Brahmins with delicious
  food. (1181)

Swan-gaited women and bull-stride men
Erected banana and areca-nut stems,[3]
Wearing pearls of exquisite choice,
Gauds of gold and gem-set jewels. (1182)

They sprinkled the streets with sandal
  paste,
Scattered petals of fragrant flowers,
Let down precious strings of pearls
From housetops whose colours put the rainbow
  to shame. (1183)

They placed on crystal pials like the moon
Jewelled lamps which burnt like the sun --
Small lamps with wicks, tall lamps
  like faggots --
And pots full of cool and tender sprouts. (1184)

---

2. The race of Raghu to which Rama belonged traced its ancestry to the Sun.

3. Decorating the wedding hall.

They put up pandals before houses like
  hills
With strings of pearls scattering brightness
Like the stars of heaven
  under Indra's command,
And holding back the spreading heat. (1185)

Servant maids put up on platforms
Lamps set with diamonds and emeralds,
And their men planted on the fortress walls
Flags on gold staffs reaching the moon,
And sent up smoke by burning *akhil*. (1186)

Some brought cartloads of fragrant flowers,
Various leaves and different fruits.
There were group dancers with flashing earrings
And those who fixed plates on elephants'
  foreheads. (1187)

Some wore sandal paste and choice clothes,
Flowers in their hair, dots on their brows;
Stood before mirrors, arched wreaths on
  their heads
And painted their lips a lovely red. (1188)

Some thought they were rubbish and swept away
The gems and gold of the peacock maids
Dropped without care or flung in a pique,
Conches, pastes and other things. (1189)

Kings arrived, Brahmins assembled,
And lovers of music vocal or on lutes;
Wandering minstrels, handmaids galore
And those appointed to note the time. (1190)

Groups of courtesans, divers artists
Regional kings dropping pearls
And gems in large heaps as they crowded
Against each other, waiting for Janaka. (1191)

Men walked about like long-tusked elephants,
Their shields like the sun, their swords
like the moon,
And joyous women expert in dancing
Seized men's souls away with their smiles. (1191)

Gods and goddesses were confused
Between their heaven and this city
Because of the blinding lights that were shot
By gems and lamps from here to there. (1193)

Some were in chariots, some in palkis;
Some on tuskers with gem-set skull caps;
Some on cow elephants and other mounts;
Some on foot, others in chariots. (1194)

Those who wore pearls and discarded old gems;
Those happy with divers gold jewels;
Those wearing flowers in novel ways;
And those in red silks with artistic designs; (1195)

Those with killing looks and those with
healing speech;
Those with red lips and those with
flashing teeth;
Those with big bosoms and those with thin
waists;
Those who walked like swans and like
cow elephants. (1196)

The wealth which filled that city
Could never have been seen in one place;
Even to think of it all together
Is not possible;
The day that Indra was crowned
In heaven bright and revered
Is the one day ornate and auspicious
For that wedding day to compare. (1197)

The King of Kings reached that hall
Gold roofed and huge in extent
Tall like a hill, set with jewels
And with provisions for Sita's wedding. (1198)

White umbrella scattering moonlight,
Gems scattering blinding sunlight,
Bees humming, horses prancing,
Hooves scattering dust, he went. (1199)

Auspicious drums sounded like thunder;
Conches blew, trumpets and tabors;
The Vedas chanted by the Brahmins
Were like the roar of the sea at night. (1200)

The chariots, elephants and prancing horses
In large numbers went part by part,
And vcassal-kings for ever bowing
Went beside him, like the gods beside Indra. (1201)

Thus he went to that hall and ascended
His golden seat set with gems.
The sages and kings in their order sat
And Janaka in his seat with his kinsmen. (1202)

The kings, the sages and the gods
And the maidens with their swan-like gait
Crowding in that matchless hall
Made it resemble golden Meru. (1203)

That jewelled hall made by Maya
Resembled the universe made by Brahma,
As within it were to be found clouds,
Lightning, planets, stars, sun and moon. (1204)

As that hall had within it
Sages, kings, gods and others,
It was like the stomach which took
Earth and heaven in a mouthful.[4] (1205)

---

4. Vishnu swallowing the universe at the time of the Dissolusion.

All the worlds from this earth onwards
Impelled by desire were crowded there --
Why say more? Let us talk now
Of him who left his snake-bed for Ayodhya. (1206)

After a bath as prescribed
In waters from the seven seas
And the Ganges and other streams
Declared sacred by the Vedas, (1207)

He bowed to the feet of that Primal Splendour
His spotless clan had ever worshipped[5]
And gave to the Brahmins the
gifts prescribed --
Virgins whose fawn eyes reached their ears. (1208)

An embodiment of grace eternal
Born to bring back penance and virtue,
His raincloud shape no artist could
have drawn
Was covered with sandal paste as if by
lightning. (1209)

The chaplets of flowers and chains of
red gold
Held by the *chuzhiam*[6] on his dark hair
Were like the full moon, white
and flower-like,
On the surging waves of a dark sea. (1210)

The flawless earrings, like the sun and
the moon,
Whispered messages into his ears
As if Sita had sent them to acquaint him
With her thoughts of love by day
and by night. (1211)

---

5. Vishnu or the Sun?

6. A hair ornament.

His forehead shone with a plate of gold
As if decked with all the flames in heaven
As Siva, black-throated and fire-armed,
Bears on his forehead the crescent moon. (1212)

His neck resembled Vishnu's conch
Under his face resembling his discus
And wore a string of pearls as though
Sita's smile filling his heart
Had rushed out and covered his body. (1213)

His shoulder adorned with a clasp
Glittered with diamonds and rubies
And looked like Vasuki coiled
Round Mount Mandara long ago.[7] (1214)

The three pearl-strings wound round his hand
To guard him the world's guardian
Seemed but to symbolise
His lordship over the three worlds. (1215)

He wore on his hands lovely to see
Kadagams, bangles of gold and gems
As if the *kalpaka*[8] eager to give
Gifts to those asking for it
Should wear on its branches ornaments. (1216)

On his chest ever Lakshmi's seat
Hung a necklace bright and lovely
Like the rainbow multi-coloured
On a dark cloud laced with lightning. (1217)

An upper garment like the string of pearls
Hung from his neck, a symbol of his grace--
Attached or detached as it pleased
Like a wise philosopher. (1218)

---

7. At the time when the ocean was churned for nectar.

8. The wish-granting tree of heaven.

The sacred thread he wore on his chest
Unapproachable in its brightness
Proclaimed to all that its triune nature
Beyond the grasp of gods and sages
Symbolised Himself the Supreme. (1219)

The belt of gold he wore around him
With its dazzling solitaire
Was as though a new world with a Brahma
Could come out of this golden lotus! (1220)

He wore a white silk which embraced him
Like the milky ocean a dark sea
With all the dazzling jewels in it
Fire-bright as if freshly polished. (1221)

He wore a gleaming sword in a sash
Golden, set with pearls and sapphires,
Like the bright sun when it goes round
Meru the auriferous mountain. (1222)

He wore also a bright girdle
With pearls in rows adorning it
From which hung a dagger and a string
Of bright gems like the morning sun. (1223)

A gem-set thigh-band faultlessly made
Spread moonlight with its pearls,
Shaped in the likeness of a shark
Its brightness measured the hall! (1224)

Anklets finely carved and tinkling
With bells and without round his feet
Each clasped them tight, as if defying
Any further attempt to measure the world.[9] (1225)

---

9. As in his incarnation as Trivikama he had done.

Shining thus he revealed himself
To all the gods, his unique self
He who had quitted for their sake
His snake-bed jewel-illuminated.[10] (1226)

Who can describe the adorning
  Of the First of the three gods,
Our root, the Supreme Bliss they seek
  Who discard this life,
Our Father, nectar from the sea
  Himself his only like. (1227)

Thousands and thousands of cows he gave
Fine gold, limitless lands and gems
To good men, Brahmins whose wealth is their lore,
And with their blessings ascended his chariot. (1228)

Its axle of gold, its wheels of silver,
Its floor with diamonds paved,
It blazed with the nine gems and resembled
The sun's one-wheeled car. (1229)

Four horses were yoked to the chariot
  Of that expert in human affairs
Fully up to the standard prescribed
  By books on equestrian lore;
Strong enough to pass all tests
  And beautiful to behold,
They were like the four goals of life
  Prescribed for earthly men. (1230)

Such was the chariot in which he went;
Bharata, his lotus eyes bedewed,
Held the whip and drove like Aruna;
One brother with bent bow behind
While another waved the fly-whisk. (1231)

---

10. The jewels in the heads of Adisesha, the serpent, providing by their brilliance so many lamps -- an idea derived from Kalidasa's Raghuvamsam.

Was it his rare and unique beauty
Or their own unending thought
Which would not let the beholders wink
And turned them into gods? (1232)

"The rakshasas who oppressed the world
Unhurt till now are finished today,"
Thought the gods who had gathered
And danced with the heavenly nymphs. (1233)

Ayodhya's citizens, we have no doubt
Intoxicated by his great beauty,
Rained flowers, scattered fragrance,
Gave away gems, gold and cloth. (1234)

The women who gave so much away
And gazing at the Lord let slip
The ornaments which they were wearing
Might well have been dealt with by
  highway robbers! (1235)

Like the sun reaching Meru
The bowman in his chariot reahed
The hall in which was the Emperor
And a sea of kings from all the world
With their arms and elephants. (1236)

The hero stepped down from the chariot
With Bharata and his younger brothers,
Bowed to the sages and fell at the feet
Of the king his father, and took his seat. (1237)

Her face the moon, herself a golden sprout
Her brow a bow, her eyes quivering fish
Sita came in a chariot from the east
Her smile recalling a jasmine flower.
Born first in the milky ocean
Then issuing from the earth,
She seemed to spring from a mountain now
To reach the marriage hall. (1238)

The grateful gods saw the hero and thought,
"How much more beautiful is today
Than the day on which the winsome maid[11]
Churned from the ocean wedded her lord!" (1239)

Her beauty exceeding the beauty of all
On this earth, in heaven and underneath,
How can I with my feeble wits
And poor mouth describe it at her wedding? (1240)

To see their beauty came to the sky
Indra with his wife Sasi,
The Crescent-crested with his wife[12]
And the Lotus-seated with the goddess of
of speech.[13] (1241)

Surrounded by a sea of Brahmins,
Thread on their chests, deeply versed,
Vasishtha came with joy to conduct
The ancient rites with the proper means. (1242)

He spread the sand, placed the *kusa*,[14]
Drew the circle for the altar,
Scattered flowers, built the fire
And recited the ancient Vedic chants. (1243)

The hero and his eager helpmate
Ascended the sacred bridal seats,
And coming together in this marriage
Were as acts of love leading to oneness. (1244)

---

11. Lakshmi who married Vishnu.

12. Siva and Parvati.

13. Brahma and Saraswati.

14. Grass for ceremonial purposes.

Janaka pouring the cool water
Said, "Firm with my daugher may your union be
Like Vishnu's with his consort Lakshmi,"
And gave her into his lotus hand. (1245)

The Brahmins' blessings, the auspicious songs
Of women looking like rare jewels,
The felicitations of kings and poets
Reverberated like conches blowing. (1246)

The rain of flowers, gold and pearls
By the gods, the kings and commoners,
Fresh and bright, made the earth
Look like the sky scattered with stars. (1247)

The hero recited all the mantras,
Poured the ghee into the fire,
And took the tender hand of the bride
In his own big and sturdy hand. (1248)

Walking behind his broad shoulders
Round the sacred and blazing fire,
The gentle girl seemed to symbolise
In the ceaseless cycle of birth and death
A body pursuing its beloved soul. (1249)

They circled the fire left to right
With the amulet thread round their wrists
And finished the rest of the rites.
Then she set her foot on the grinding stone
And looked at the one in front of her,
Arundhati the chaste and unwavering. (1250)

The rest of the rites he did with joy;
Crowned his head with the sages' feet;
Fell too before his father
And taking the braceleted girl by the hand
Went into his own residence. (1251)

Hailed the drums, hailed the conches;
Hailed the Vedas, hailed the gods;
Hailed the arts, hailed benedictions;
Hailed the bees, hailed the sea! (1252)

He fell at the feet of Kaikeyi
Whom he loved even more than his own mother;
Then at the feet of his mother;
Then at the feet of Sumitra. (1253)

The Swan Girl too fell at their feet
Looking like golden lotuses;
And they seeing her like Arundhati
Rejoiced and said, "What a jewel for our son!" (1254)

They embraced that jewelled koel
And said, "What other girl would have suited
Our handsome son?" and their hearts
Rejoiced as much as their eyes. (1255)

They gave that goddess of womankind
Countless crores of gold coins,
Endless crores of rare jewels,
Hosts of handmaids, extensive land
And the most expensive garments. (1256)

That sea of mercy, dark like the sea
With the sea of love beside him,
Obeyed the sages, seas of learning
Telling him what to do,
And repaired to a bed which resembled
His ancient bed on the milky sea. (1257)

His marriage was in Panguni
Under the Uttara asterism
And Vasishtha with the right homa
Hallowed the wedding of that Lion
Whose names number a thousand.[15] (1258)

---

15. Vishnu, like other gods, is often worshipped with the chanting of his thousand names.

Janaka, spotless and victorious,
Told Rama's younger brothers and kinsmen,
"Take as brides my brother's daughters
Fair as Lakshmi, lotus-born." (1259)

Those three, Kusadwaja's daughters
The king with his spear ever ready,
Mature girls--dark-eyed divine,
Thoroughly fit, those other three married. (1260)

After their marriage, Janaka the King
Gave each one whatever he wished,
Sharing with him not only his fame
But all his possessions piled over years. (1261)

Dasaratha too, after similar gifts
Enjoyed the company of learned sages,
And spent some days there slipping by--
What happened then we shall narrate. (1262)

23. PARASURAMA

Rama and Janaka's daughter
Enjoying themselves as was meet,
Kausika gave them his Vedic blessing
And went north to the great mountain. (1263)

The mighty King said one day sweetly,
"Let the army start for our city
And ascended his peerless chariot,
The vassal kings bowing like a herd of
  elephants. (1264)

At his feet his sons and wives,
The kings and others around him,
The mighty King took the road
And Mithila's citizens were plunged in
  sorrow
As if their bodies were parting with their
  souls. (1265)

The Emperor took his seat in front;
And the hearts of the citizens following
  him
The hero went with his wisp-waist wife
Surrounded by his brothers, his likes. (1266)

That King, majestic like an elephant
Saw peacocks going to his right,
Crows to his left impeding him,
And stopped his chariot at these omens. (1267)

Crying a halt he sent for an augur
And asked him if these omens were good;
And the augur versed in bird-lore said,
"There will be trouble,but all shall
go well." (1268)

Right then came one with flashing hair
Which pierced the darkness of the sky,
An axe in his hand, eyes darting fire,
A gold hill walking with a thunderous voice! (1269)

He twanged a mighty red-gold bow
And picked sharp arrows out;
The world shook like a vessel tossed
On a stormy sea;
And the elephant pillars upholding the earth
Felt exhausted
The sea boiled over and changed its place
And the gods in fear fled. (1270)

All the people who beheld him
Were filled with consternation.
"Did he want heaven to crash down
Or the earth to go up?
Did he want unnumbered beings
To reach the maw of death?
Why did fire shoot from his eyes
Like blood from a sore?" (1271)

His hatchet never at rest belched smoke,
The sun in his chariot lost his bearings;
Fire darted from him as if the volcano
In the sea had shot up and risen to the sky. (1272)

His shoulders stretched to the four quarters;
His flowing hair touched the sun and the moon;
He was like Siva at the Dissolution
When earth, water, fire, wind and sky
Shall be no more! (1273)

He was armed with an axe which had hewed
Like so many branches of a tree
The thousand shoulders of a jewel among kings*
Whose matchless army could have covered
Our entire sea-girt earth. (1274)

For one king's single sin
His axe hacked all the race
Twentyone generations
Root and branch.
And weeding the world thus
He bathed in the blood which rose like the sea. (1275)

His penance Patience personified,
  His wrath a blazing fire,
When his tired rival left the field
  He pierced with a shaft a mountain
And made a route
  For migratory birds.[1] (1276)

He came with an axe having levelled
  the hill
With its cap of clouds, and made the sea rise;
And the father of the darling hero mused,
"Why has this terrible man come now?" (1277)

---

* Kartaviryarjunan who had killed Parasurama's father.

1. The reference is to a competition between Parasurama and Subrahmanya as to who could pierce the Krauncha mountain. Subrahmanya was defeated in this contest arranged by his father Siva: and Parasurama thereupon won, making a way for migratory birds to go through that mountain to the northern regions.

The joyous army fled in fright.
With beetling brows and fiery eyes
In a thunderous rage he approached the car
Containing the Prince with the lovely eyes --
A bull confronting a lion which asked,
"Who is this?" (1278)

The King went anxious to placate,
His chapleted head touching his feet;
But his rage was a sea uncrossable
Blazing like the fire of Dissolution,
And he addressed the hero, in a voice
like a drum: (1279)

"I know the strength of the bow you broke
And would test the strength of your jewelled shoulders.
My shoulders too are itching a little --
For no other reason" said that bully,
"have I come". (1280)

Hearing this, said the distressed king:
"You conquered the world and gave it to
a sage;
Siva, Vishnu and Brahma are nothing to you
Is a poor mortal of any account?
You hold now to ransom both his life and mine. (1281)

"With your battle-axe belching fire," he said,
"It is the bad whom you should kill.
Has he wantonly done wrong?
Why should the strong not engage the strong
But expend their strength on the weak?"
he said. (1282)

"You who ruled singly this seven-isled
world
Gave it away to a great sage;
You spared in your grace some of the kings
Who ruled this earth. Is it right
To be wrathful again?" he said and went on -- (1283)

"What is that might which those around
Decry because it is excessive?
Can it be right? Isn't that only right
Which acquires fame by its righteousness?
O Man of Might, is this might real? (1284)

"You, whose shoulders are like pillars
of stone,
My son is not your foe. Should he die
I too will die with my people and kin.
Don't destroy me, your servant,
with my race --
This is my request to you," he said. (1285)

Ignoring him who fell at his feet,
The fiery-eyed man went to Rama enrobed
And seeing his helplessness the King
Collapsed like a snake struck by lightning. (1286)

Not minding that great king's prostration
And unmindful of his own in the womb of Fate,
"That bow which was Siva's once was cracked;
Listen to its history now," he said. (1287)

"There were of old two matchless bows
Bright like the sun in his one-wheeled car,
Strong and imperishable like Mounnt Meru
Made by one no earthling could approach. (1288)

"One of these Uma's husband liked;[2]
The other was taken by the world-measurer;[3]
When they heard this, the gods wished to know
Which would prove stronger, and asked Brahma. (1289)

---

2. Siva.

3. Vishnu.

"The Lotus-seated thought well
Of the gods' enquiry and contrived
That the two regarded the foremost of gods
Fought each other over these bows. (1290)

"They strung the bows and the seven
  worlds trembled,
The quarters changed places, fierce fires
  broke out;
Siva's bow was cracked, and in anger
He decided to resume the fight. (1291)

"When the gods separated them.
Then Siva gave his bow to Indra
And Vishnu proving himself the victor
Gave his to sage Richika and left. (1292)

"Richika gave it to my father, and he
Gave it to me. If you, lad, can bend it
No king can rival you and I
Shall abandon my fight. Listen further: (1293)

"To break a damaged bow is nothing
My enmity, Manava,[4] to your race
Is because a diabolical king
Killed to my rage my guiltless father. (1294)

"With my battle-axe sharp and joyous
I killed twentyone royal descents;
Weeded them out, and with their blood
Offered libations to my father and rested. (1295)

"I gave all the world to a sage,
Humbled all my enemies;
And after numerous sacrifices
Resided on a lovely mountain;
Over there I heard with my ears

---

4. One decended from Manu.

The sound of that bow broken
And have come here in my rage.
I will fight you if you are strong.
Take this bow" he said, "from me." (1296)

Thus he spoke, and Rama smiled,
His face shining. "Give me that bow,
Vishnu's victorious one."
He took it and bent it to the terror of
  that sage. (1297)

"You killed all the kings of the earth
But being the son of a Vedic sage
And a *tapasvi* too, you should not be killed.
But this shaft shan't fail. Quick, show
  me its target!" (1298)

"O righteous one," the sage replied,
"Be not wroth; I know now
That you are the First, with garland
  and discus;
How can that bow which Siva wielded
Not worthy of you, but break in your hand? (1299)

"With your lovely feet and golden anklet
You are indeed Vishnu with the discus.
What trouble can this world have now?
Even the bow I gave won't measure
  up to you. (1300)

"That the arrow you aim may not go vain
Let it destroy all my penances,"
He said; and Rama's hand letting go
It took all his penances and came back. (1301)

"O you, with the hue of the purest gem,
Garlanded with the basil, refuge of all!
May all your wishes be well fulfilled.
Grant me leave to go," he bowed and went. (1302)

After he left, the immaculate one
Restored to his father his life lost

though fear
And honouring him with his love
Took him across the sea of his sorrow. (1303)

His senses regained, his sorrows ended
That great king of musty tuskers
Having crossed the sea of sorrow
Now plunged into an ocean of happpiness. (1304)

He embraced his son, kissed his head,
Bathed in the tears from his eyes
The one who took from that heartless man
His bow, and loaded him with shame. (1305)

"Can all the three worlds have done,"
he thought,
"The manly deed this boy has achieved?
Truly this straight lad will give
Each one his desert, here and hereafter." (1306)

Of the gods who rained flowers
Rama gave Varuna that bow
Saying, "Guard this boon and bane,"
And his army acclaiming, rached Ayodhya. (1307)

They reached there, and on a happy day
The great King told Bharata
Something which all who heard it
Would surely have endorsed. (1308)

"My son, the King your grandfather
Is anxious to see you,
And so, my handsome boy, you must
Go to well-watered Kekaya." (1309)

So bidden he bowed and went to Rama
To touch his lotus feet with his head.
Rama being his only life,
His body went, his soul was here. (1310)

With Yudajit, king of horses,
And an army with many trumpets
He reached that cool place Kekaya
With his brother in a week's time. (1311)

After he went, the King of Kings
Ruled his state without a fault,
And many things happened, which we shall
tell,
In answer to the gods' penances! (1312)

APPENDIX

Additional Stanzas

Numbered as in the edition by
V.M.Gopala Krishnamachariar

Proem (After 11 of our text)

To those who tell the might of Rama
With his bow
Which pulverised the prolonged strength
Of the demon hordes
Will come those blessings which they seek
Clear sight and fame,
Salvation's path as well as Lakshmi's
Favouring look. (12)

The Divine Descent (After 287 of our text)

The time of birth of that righteous tusker
Was the ninth day of the Chaitra month
The seventh lunar asterism
In the excellent *lagna*, cancer;
And four planets in the eleventh house
Stood ascendent at their highest. (289)

They who cast his horoscope
Likewise inscribed on leaves of gold
Those of the other three brothers
Which Brahaspathi[1] himself would have blessed. (290)

Tataka Killed (After 359 of our text)

"There was once in the Yaksha race
A Suketu whose strength was such

---

1. The priest of the gods.

As to astonish all the world,
Fierce like fire without smoke,
Endowed with an elephant's strength. (363)

"Distressed in mind for lack of a son
He invoked the Lotus Lord
Brahma, first of the great gods,
With many day-long penances. (364)

"The grandsire of the rare Vedas,
Listen, bright lad, appeared before him,
And told what ailed him was the lack of a son,
Replied, "You'll have no sons but a daughter. (365)

"Lovely like Lakshmi on her lotus
A very peacock for shimmering grace
She shall be strong as a thousand elephants.
Go," said Brahma and disappeared. (366)

"A daughter obtained by his grace
And growing like the lotus-goddess,[2]
He wondered who should be her husband
And married her to his kin Suketu. (367)

"The Yaksha and that siren mingled
In a sea of bliss and enjoyed themselves
As if they were Kaman and Rati[3]
And their night and day an endless feast. (368)

"The days passed, and from the womb
Of that woman bright like Lakshmi
Emerged to this world's terror
Maricha with hill-like shoulders
And Subahu a matchless wrestler. (369)

---

2. Lakshmi.

3. Manmatha, the god of love, and his wife.

"While they grew up in witchcraft and treachery
And might unguessed at even by those
Nearer to them than their own mother,
That fierce Yaksha, their begetter, (370)

"In his exuberance pulled up the trees
Which grew in the ashram of the sage Agastya
Who to rid the world of the sinful Titans
In a single handful had drunk up the sea! (371)

"When he destroyed all the trees
And the spotted and antlered bucks and does
In that ashram so loved by the sages
The great sage opened his fiery eye
And reduced the Yaksha to a heap of ashes. (372)

"When the woman with the golden bracelet
Heard about her husband's death
She reached the ashram of that sage
With her sons in a blazing rage
Swearing she would finish him. (373)

"When they approached and yelled at him
In a voice like thunder, and in a blaze
Which frightened the gods, dimmed the sun
  and the moon
Sent a-quiver the clouds with their lightning
And threatened to shatter the very globe, (374)

"He who gave us that ocean called Tamil
His eyes darting fire gave a hoot
And said in a voice outhundering their thunder,
'Because of your enormities
You shall degenerate into demons.' (375)

"In that instant they became
Senseless cannibals with their eyes
Like melted copper frightening
All things on earth and in the sky. (376)

"Unable to withstand then
The anger and the curse of that sage
They went to the Titan Sumali
And claimed a close kinship with him. (377)

"Those sons of that sinful woman
Stayed many days with him in the nether world,
And regarded by Ravana as his uncles
They ruin the world like the final tempest! (378)

"Away from those two strong sons
And brooding over that sage's hatred
Her heart afire, she has entered
This forest aflame on all sides." (379)

(After 377 of our text)

"There is one thing more, O Emperor's darling,"
Said that sage of boundless penance,
"That I should like to tell you --
And that is what happened in the past. (399)

"When the great sage Brigu's kayal-eyed wife,
Kyati sheltered the Asuras
Out of her compassion for them,
Vishnu with his discus put her to death. (400)

"The perverse Mandari who thought all life
On earth and heaven was meant for her food
Was deprived of her own life
By heaven's king with his thunderbolt. (401)

"Thus Hari and Indra both
Achieved fame not infamy.
Can you find any fault in them?
Tell me, garlanded Rama." (402)

The Yaga (After 399 of our text)

"Their names were Kusan and Kusanabhan,
Adurthan the faultless, victorious Vasu,

Of whom Kusan dwelt in Kausambi,
Kusanabhan in Mahodaya,
Adurthan in Dharmaranya
And Vasu in Giriviracham. (424)

Ahalya (After 454 of our text)

When Rama asked, "What is this grove?"
The sage who sought passivity through penance
Replied to him in clear terms;
"This is where Kasyapa's wife
In pity for her sons did *tapas*. (480)

"A woman Vidyadhara reaching the supramundane
heaven
Where my Lord dwells, praised Lotus-feet Lakshmi,
And she much pleased, gave her as reward
A garland of bee-haunted flowers. (481)

"That garland wound around her vina,
The Vidhyadhara reached Brahma's world
And met Durvasas the angry sage --
Who seeing she was his lady's musician
Fell at her feet and stood in reverence. (482)

"Great sage", she said, "of boundless penance
Take this garland from her head
Whose dwelling is that lord's chest
Who makes, preserves, swallows and spits out
All by himself all the worlds." (483)

"'How great is my penance that I should get
This garland from her head who is queen of
the gods!'
Thought that sage famed for his anger,
And dancing in joy at his soul's salvation,
Crowned with that garland, reached Indra's
heaven. (484)

"Like a dark cloud on a silver hill
Glittering with the sun's red rays

And decked with a thousand lotuses[4]
Looked Indra on his Iravatam.[5] (485)

The street was filled with the dance and song
Of Ramba, Menaka, Tilottama and Uravasi,
Their voices sweeter than sugarcan juice,
Anklets tinkling on feet as tender
As the flowers that filled Manmatha's
quiver.[6] (486)

Fly-whisks on each side white as moonbeams
Resting on a blue mountain,
A white parasol over his head
Like the full moon in all his[7] splendour; (487)

"Kettledrums, bangs and conches drowning
The hallelujas and auspicious songs,
Vedic chants which roared like the sea
And a noise which arose like the final flood
Marked the procession and stunned the sage! (488)

"The matchless sage gave in his joy
The garland he bore to Indra,
Who picking it up with his goad
Put it on Airavatam's[8] nape;
And that beast seized it with its trunk
Thick and streched like a palmtree,
And throwing it down trampled on it. (489)

"Fire darted from the sage's eyes;
The gods ran hither and thither thinking

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4. The thousand eyes of Indra glowing like red lotuses.

5. Indra's white elephant.

6. The god of love shorp his intended victorious with flowers.

7. The moon in Hindu mythology is masculine.

8. Indra's elephant.

That the universe would be burnt to ashes;
The twin lamps of heaven turned back;
Darkness fell on all eight quarters
And the entire world was seen to spin! (490)

"Smoke arose from every pore;
A laugh arose like the god Siva's
When he burnt the triple city;[9]
The brows on the sage's forehead arose;
Flames arose in his eyes,
And in a voice which stunned thunder
He said to Indra, 'Sinful upstart! (491)

"'My great penance got for me
This garland from a damsel
Who got it from the primal goddess
Seated joyfully on the chest
Of the lord of all the elements,
Of Mother Earth and the matchless Vedas. (492)

"'You despised the fragrant garland
I gave you today in my joy at your glory;
All your treasures manifold
Shall take flight into the sea
And you yourself, your greatness shrunk,
Shall sink in misery,' said the angry sage. (493)

"Rambha and others, karpaka,[10] the nine gems,
Kamadenu,[11] Ucchaihsravas,[12] Airavatam,

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9. Tripura which Siva burnt with a laught to teach it a lesson.

10. The wish-fulfilling tree.

11. The wish-fulfilling cow.

12. Indra's horse.

Ceased their connection and fled into the sea
Leaving nothing of value behind. (494)

"When heaven and all the other worlds
Were striken with poverty
Because of the great sage's ire,
The gods with Siva and Brahma
Went to the ever-fortunate Lord.[13] (495)

"When Brahma and the other gods
Told the world-measurer
The result of the curse of that angry sage
And said that he was their sole refuge'
He told them generously, 'Do not fear. (496)

"'With Mandara for churning rod
And Vasuki for rope
The cool moon as attached staff
And the gods and Titans to pull
Churn the ocean for nectar to issue
After throwing medicinal plants in it. (497)

"'I too will be there. Get going quickly.'
For this favour loudly they applauded,
Praised him, danced in joy, exclaimed,
'No more fear for us! Our sorrow is ended!' (498)

"They pulled down the mountain, wound Vasuki,
Fixed the moon in the proper place
Threw in the plants and churned the ocean!
But the earth began to shake
And adishesha[14] in the world beneath
Was obliged to creep and crawl! (499)

"The Lord who despises sinners
Bore the mandara on his back as a tortoise

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13. Lit. the Lord with Lakshmi on his chest.

14. The thousand-headed snake supposed to bear the world on his heads.

Keeping it steady with his thousand hands
To recover the things lost by the sage's
wrath. (500)

"All things lost reappeared through his grace.
When the gods and demons fell out at that time.
The latter lured by the siren Mohini
Died, and the gods ate up the nectar. (501)

"He gave the poison and the crescent
To Siva on his bull,
The rare trees and other valuable things
To Indra,
The great old treasures to various others
And himself, Sridhara, took Lakshmi and the
gem Kaustubha.[15] (502)

"Diti greatly distressed at the time
Went to Kashyapa and fell at his feet.
'My children have died through the machinations,'
Said she, 'of Indra and the rest.
Grant me a son for their destruction.' (503)

'I grant you a son as asked,' he said,
'Go down to earth and do penance
For a thousand years.
And you will gain your end." And Diti did. (504)

"Indra hearing this went to her
and served as her slave.
Finding once a slip in her penance
He entered her womb and slit the phoetus in it
into seven.
To her sobbing and in tears he left behind
the name *marut*.[16] (505)

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15. A rare gem.

16. The seven pieces became the seven maruts, winds.

"This is the place where that happened,
While that is Saravana the reedy
Where the Wind-god and Ganges unable to bear
The strong red god borne by Uma to Siva
  the Pure Crescent-crested
Left him to take shape as he might.[17] (506)

(After 456 of our text)

"Tell me, father," said Rama, "all the glory
Of this great river," whereupon the sage
Held forth thus: "My guardian son,
There was once in Ayodhya a king who ruled
All this world, a kinsman of yours,
Sagara the miracle.[18] (509)

Of the two wives of that victorious king,
She of Vidharba bore Asamanja, father of Amsuman,
And Sumati the gentle, Garuda's sister,
Bore sixtythousand pious sons.[19] (510)

"The gods seeing Sagara the strong
Embarking on the Aswamedha
Depending on the might of his sons,
Outraged told it to Indra
Who hid that bright steed behind Kapila.[20].

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17. Referring to the birth of Subrahmanya, the generalissimo of the gods.

18. Sagara was born out of a phoetus which had been poisoned by a jealous step-mother. The miracle lay in his coming to birth-with the poison.

19. As contrasted with Asamanja who delighted in throwing children into the river and drowning them. The word could also be translated "the impious", which would fit their action later on when they attacked the sage Kapila.

20. A rishi doing penance in the nether world.

"Amsuman trailing the leaping horse,
Confused, sought it through the world
Not knowing that heaven's king had hid it,
And bewildered informed his grandsire. (512)

"The king heard it and told his sons,
And they in their volcanic wrath,[21]
Eyes darting fire, searched the earth
And dug it up revealing the nether world. (513)

"They say that they dug a deep trench
Northeast a hundred yojanas[22] wide
And seeing the horse behind Kapila in penance,
Raged like fire, strutted and abused him. (514)

"The sage opening his eyes in wrath
The sixtythousand princes were burnt to ashes
Like Tripura pulverised by Siva's laughter,[23]
And spies took the news to the king at his yaga. (515)

"Striken senseless, seeing a sorrow without end,
He sent for his grandson and said to him,
'Because they are dead should our planned
yaga end?'
And Amsuman went down to Kapila's dwelling. (516)

"Startled by the sight he saw
Of his uncles' corpses a hill of ashes,
He fell at Kapila's lotus feet
And told him the cause of his coming;
And he telling all let him take back
the horse. (517)

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21. Their wrath is compared to a fire in the sea sometimes thought of as emerging from a steed at other times as issuing out of a volcano.

22. A measure of length between 9 and 13 miles.

23. One of the exploits of Siva to teach a lesson to some arrogant rishis.

"O Prince with a name which will go down the
ages,[24]
When Amsuman heard that spotless sage
He bowed in reverence and took back the horse.
The King gave the *havis*[25] to the gods,
Ended the sacrifice and, abdicating
In favour of his son, himself died. (518)

"As it was dug by Sagara's sons
The sea with its fish is known as *sagara;*
Amsuman, matchless, ruled all the earth;
And from him in time came Bhagiratha. (519)

"Making himself monarch of the world
He investigated into his past
And was told all by the all-knowing sage;
His forehead then touching the ground,
he said, (520)

"'Be gracious, Sir, to instruct me
How by a penance I may remove
The curse which that angry sage pronounced
That keeps my kinsmen for ever in hell.' (521)

"That faultless sage answered sweetly,
'King of kings, you need not grieve.
To save your dead ancestors
Do endless penance day after day
To Brahma on his lotus throne. (522)

"Leaving the world to his minister
He reached the Himalayas meet for such penance

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24. Lit. with a fame fit to be inscribed.

25. An oblation or burnt offering.

And spent tenthousand years in *tapas* --
And to him appeared primal Brahma. (523)

"'I am pleased with your great penance,' he said,
But as your numerous kinsmen met their death
By the curse of a rare sage,
They can be saved only if
Their bones are laved by the
heavenly stream.[26] (524)

"'And if that river is to come down to earth
None but Siva can bear her descent.
So start a penance to that goddess-twined,[27]
Said the maker of all things and
disappeared. (525)

"When he did another great penance
For the same period to placate Siva,
That flaming god appeared and said,
'I shall fulfill your wish' and vanished.
And he prayed to Ganga for fivethousand years. (526)

"That wonderful river took the shape of a woman
Lovely as a tendril, and said to him:
'What use is your penance? If that stormy stream
Comes down, who can withstand her?
What Siva said he must have meant as a joke.
Do penance again to know his meaning.' (527)

"Distressed Bhagiratha did penance again
For two thousand and five hundred years

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26. Ganga, at that time flowing only in heaven.

27. Siva, half his body himself, the other half his wife Parvati.

To the spotless one with the golden tresses
With basil, *oomatham*, *erukku* and *kuvilai.*[28] (528)

"And the Pure One from the great mountain
Appeared and asked him what he wanted.
And he, bowing, said, 'Lord,
These were the words which Ganga uttered,'
Whereupon said Siva to him,
'Be not afraid, we shall ensure
That nothing is spilt, and the earth protected.'
And he went on another penance
For twothousand and five hundred years. (529)

"That king had gone on a rare penance
On dried leaves and dust, water, wind and sunlight
And finally given up even the last
For thirtythousand years out of melting
love. (530)

"The great river came down in a torrent
Which frightened by its noise
The worlds of Brahma and Indra;
And Siva hid it all in his hair
Not letting spill a single drop. (531)

"When the king saw that great river hid
Like a glittering dewdrop on a grass
blade's tip
In the Pure One's head, he stood astonished
And bowed to the god. But 'Dont't grieve,'
said he,
'The sky-river is caught now in our tress,'
And a few drops let out descended on earth. (532)

"The king strode fast in front of it
And the river rushed to rescue the dead
Ruining in the process the sage Jahnu's yaga
Whereupon in a fury he took it in his palm (533)

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28. Wild flowers.

"And to the joy of the ascetics there
Drank it up with great delight!
The king saw this and narrated all
To the sage who said, 'Take it away then'
And let the river out through his ear,
And with a leap the river flowed over
  the ashes. (534)

"The Sagaras filling hell went high up
And the heavenly hosts rained flowers
To the music of drums and other instruments,
The king returning to fortressed Ayodhya. (535)

"My son, that heavenly river born
At the foot of Vishnu measuring the earth
And pushing it far beyond our globe
When Brahma washed it with the water in his jug,
Was brought down to earth by Bhagiratha
When Siva was ready to receive it. (536)

"Since Bhagiratha did penance so long
To bring salvation to the Sagaras through her
This river got the name of Bhagirathi;
And since on earth it passed through the ears
Of Jahnu it is called Jahnavi." (537)

They heard all this with joyful amazement,
Bowed to the river and crossed it.
Then Visala's king with his hill-like shoulders
Welcomed them and saluted the sage.
They stayed a while there, exchanging
  sweet words
And thereafter left the place. (538)

(After 474 of our text)

When the gods saw Indra thus
Led by Brahma they went to Gautama
And pleaded for him; and that great sage,
His anger cooled, changed those signs

To a thousand precious eyes.
The gods then went to their several abodes
And Ahalya fell down as a stone. (557)

Dasaratha on the March (After 740 of our text)

Before the drumbeats reached their ears
Braceleted maids and handsome youths,
Spearmen and victorious kings
Swelled with joy like a sea with waves. (823)

The Marriage (After 1207 of our text)

And wearing his own sacred mark
Which takes all from Brahma onwards
Out of the darkness enshrouding them
Up to that state whence none returns. (1292)